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“The digital transformation of the tourism industry. The case of Thessaloniki online presence.”

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SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION & LEGAL STUDIES

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Master of Science (MSc) in Hospitality and Tourism Management

November 2019

Thessaloniki - Greece

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I hereby declare that the work submitted is mine and that where I have made use of another's work, I have attributed the source(s) according to the Regulations set in the Student's Handbook.

November 2019

Thessaloniki – Greece

SUMMARY

Nowadays, technology is experiencing exponential growth. This results in the transformation of various sectors, such as tourism. In particular, in the context of the shift to digitalization, tourism has now taken on a new form, e-tourism. This concept refers to the integration of technology and telecommunications into every tourism process.

This shift has undoubtedly brought about a number of changes in the industry, and as every new technology has both advantages and disadvantages.

The present thesis makes an introduction to all these elements, presenting the views of several authors. It then focuses on social media and their penetration into the tourism industry. In this context, the advantages and disadvantages of social media in tourism are analyzed and an overview of a modern trend in tourism, influencer marketing is also reviewed.

Then there is the case of Thessaloniki, where the city's online presence in the field of tourism is presented, its main tourism campaigns are analyzed and the awards it has won are highlighted.

Finally, the dissertation concludes with the conclusions made, highlighting the shift in e-tourism and in particular the use of social media. Thessaloniki is a thorny example of a city that made good use of new technologies and managed to highlight its tourist product.

Keywords: *e-tourism, social media, Thessaloniki, tourism campaigns, influencer marketing*

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1. Introduction

The evolution of the Internet and the development of ICT sector have changed the economy of the information society and have prompted the development of another economy - the digital economy. In the advanced age clearly every business, separately, and each state must adjust to the computerized era, to incorporate new technologies so as to endure and develop in the new economy. (Soava, 2017)

Through the Internet, tourists are directly connected to information that allows them to search and find the best deals, offering access to various sites, comparing destinations, hotels or flights, but most notably the opportunity to get to know the views and experiences of those in these destinations through different social networks or forums. Through social media opinions and opinions are shared so travel agents, travel agencies and hotels can advertise at minimal cost and attract new customers by promoting services and interacting with those who spend time on this type of network. This opportunity has led to increased speeds in communications and services because the digital generation is eager to make spontaneous decisions and make last minute reservations, which has led to the development of facilities such as electronic check-in. (Soava, 2017)

Lately much more tourism services suppliers understand that Social Media helps their business become visible, and subsequently, an advancement of social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus and so on.) come to the forefront. As the promotion is completed now it is incredibly restricted, there are investigated just the quantity of likes, comments or distributions for specific posts. It is as yet a beginning method to be advertised, which haven't clarified defined objectives and a reasonable methodology to pursue.

There are various internet platforms identified with the travel industry action (route planner, travel, virtual reconstruction, blogs developed besides travel agencies, etc.), at which the travel industry suppliers should be interconnected. (Soava, 2017)

Marketing has reached another level with the emergence of social media. In the changing environment of the service industry, tourism seems to receive the most attention from customers, stakeholders and other sectors through social media. (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017)

The social media-backed consumer-marketing chat room has become extremely crowded. Both advertising and consumer messages may be disseminated or challenged by other consumers or traditional media. In this complex social marketing based on buzz echoverse, it is progressively significant for brands to have the option to enhance their messages. (Gretzel, 2018)

This thesis consists of three main chapters. The first deals with the change that telecommunications have brought to tourism in a more general context. More specifically, it introduces the concept of e-tourism, analyzes the changes that have been identified as well as the advantages and disadvantages that technology has brought to tourism.

In the second chapter we focus on social media, as they have been shown to have a great influence on the tourism industry. In more detail, the emergence of social media in tourism is reviewed, social media are linked to tourism marketing and referenced influencer marketing.

The third chapter analyzes the case of Thessaloniki, which describes its online presence, the campaigns it has run and the awards it has received. Finally, the dissertation closes with the conclusions.

2. Digital transformation of the tourism industry

2.1 e-Tourism

Internet has drastically changed the tourism industry; it has permitted the sightseers both to access reliable and accurate data, but also the likelihood of booking in real time, prompting improved quality of service and consequently increment consumer loyalty, changing it in the biggest online industry. Thus:

“Electronic tourism (e-tourism) can be defined as a piece of web-based business and joins some of the fastest emerging technologies, for example, telecommunication and IT, accommodation and the administration/advertising/strategic planning. The letter “e” shows the status of electronic and represents the electronic markets (e-marketplace), where the e-business experiences the e-buyers, e-government, e-accomplices and other electronic business on the web. Direct interaction with the travel industry market offers the likelihood of the hospitality specialists to respond to market changes continuously. The introduction of digital technologies turns into a need for the travel industry stakeholders that needed to reconsider their activity and acquire new advertising and communication strategies, to keep up on a dynamic and profoundly focused market. E-tourism includes completing all the tourism services in a digital platform.”



Figure 1, “e-Tourism” (source:

<https://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/business/178597/online-tourism-market-potential-remains-untapped.html>)

Travel industry suppliers who utilize digital technologies increment their effectiveness through automation of a few procedures which certainly drives to cost reduction, and the entrance on the worldwide market features the competitiveness through proper source management. In this way, in the tourism management there is a need of a permanent dynamic to build up techniques relying upon the challenging environment where it operates. Electronic tourism technique depends on the ideal mix among business and IT and the travel industry. A significant component of e-tourism is that it bolsters business execution on a worldwide market at the very least cost but with most great productivity.

The travel services suppliers should attempt to concentrate on adding value at the offered packages, building dedication and trust on voyagers that have in a general sense changed their manner, and on a lasting investigation of execution both online and offline. The sites of the tour operators ought to have a more efficient structure; the stacking time ought to be short and the messages sent to clients must be applicable and for all time redid as indicated by clients. Tourism providers that offer quick and friendly services will increase their traffic and develop their business. They should be always refreshing their database on destinations, to give pictures that draw in travelers. Also, the challenges, the travel industry trends, the client needs, the utilization of websites, the statistic profiles and the effect of non-accessibility of on-line payments and other information that supporting the advancement of a feasible tourism industry ought to be investigated.

In our globalized environment a few perspectives ought to be considered, such as: promoting sustainable tourism as far as social, cultural, economic and ecological terms, the foundation of guidelines and benchmarks required so as to win buyer confidence.

It is important to advertise destinations in key tourism portals, engines and look for passages and on destinations records through as many links as could be expected under the circumstances with the goal that descriptors are not constrained by nation or the tourism. For a solid tourism sector, it is obligatory to build up a brand picture for improving the customer confidence and its appearance in any digital strategy.

The rise of Internet has prompted a change in visitors' behavior since they have direct access to a huge amount of data given by the travel industry organizations. Simple and quick access to an assortment of data about destinations, items, services and costs changes the tourists in certain individuals critical and careful in the decision of holiday destination. In the web age the decisions of autonomously destinations are multiplying than those organized.

The consumer satisfaction must be guaranteed close by the online exchanges and the quality and complexity of the offered services, the security and legitimacy of the data and exchanges. Customers of such tourism secure the services by means of the Internet, utilizing diverse unique apparatuses for picking destinations, getting data web based, looking at costs and finally making transactions. e-Tourists look for feedback and personal experiences of different travelers on specialized blogs and social networks and they are less keen on following certain preset outings and they want substantially more to make their own schedule contingent upon their desires.

e-Tourists are mainly young and fully working people, that live in a challenging environment, having very short relaxation time, thus, they need to consolidate fun and relaxation with the work. Tourism organizations need to meet these special needs through quick understanding of customers, and they should arrive at the potential clients with complete, current and customized products and services that address their issues.

An ever-increasing number of the sightseers need dynamic travel packages; thus, the Internet comes to address their issues, helping them to design online their ideal getaway, permitting immediate and dynamic interaction among purchasers and tour operators. Dynamic bundles include that a client should have the possibility to assemble the components of a vacation, including flights, lodgings, vehicle rentals, tickets to theater or games, and so on. These bundles are found ordinarily in travel brochures. The new technologies can consolidate a few segments of a trip to make the ideal occasion. The tourism package made like this, requires just one client's payment, concealing individual segment costs. (Soava, 2017)

2.2 Statistics

According to International Telecommunication Union report (2015) more than three billion people (3.2 billion) use the Internet in the world (over 40% of world population) and eight of the top ten countries in the ranking of countries with the most users are European countries.

The most connected area of the world is Europe (82.1% of all inhabitants have at least an Internet connection), followed by America (with 60%). At European level, the number of Internet users rose by 19% compared to 2010, at this time there are 426.9 million Internet users representing 65% of the total European population. (Soava, 2017)

More specifically for the tourism sector, in 2018 digital travel sales worldwide increased 10.4% to \$694.41 billion. And concerning the bookings, over 82% of travel bookings in 2018 were completed via a website or mobile app, without human interaction. (cmo.com)

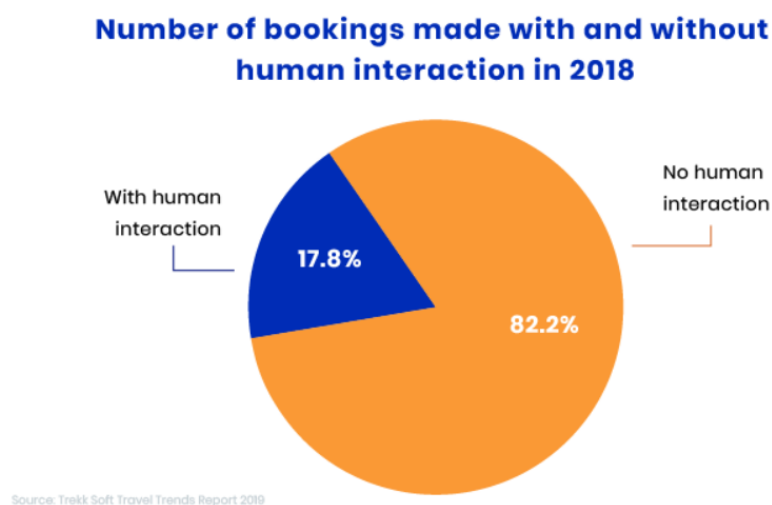


Figure 2. Source: <https://rubygarage.org/blog/digital-transformation-trends-in-travel-industry> (Number of bookings made with and without human interaction in 2018)

The following image depicts the expected average reskilling needs in the aviation, travel and tourism industry worldwide between 2018 and 2022, broken down by length per employee.

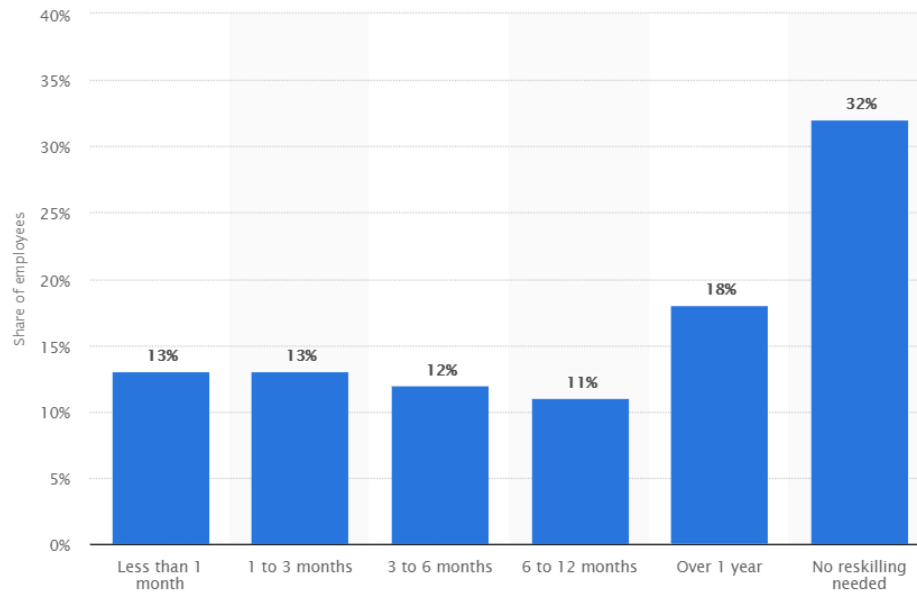


Figure 3. Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/948162/aviation-travel-tourism-reskilling-needs-worldwide/> (Expected average reskilling needs in the aviation, travel and tourism industry worldwide between 2018 and 2022, by length)

During the survey, respondents expected that 13% of their employees will require reskilling of less than one month by 2022. Also, 12% of their employees will require reskilling of 3 to 6 months and 32% of them will not need reskilling. This survey shows that there will be a gradual need of reskilling.

Finally, a survey is presented regarding the expected impact of new technologies on the aviation, travel and tourism workforce worldwide between 2018 and 2022. This issue is the main matter which is analyzed at the next chapter.

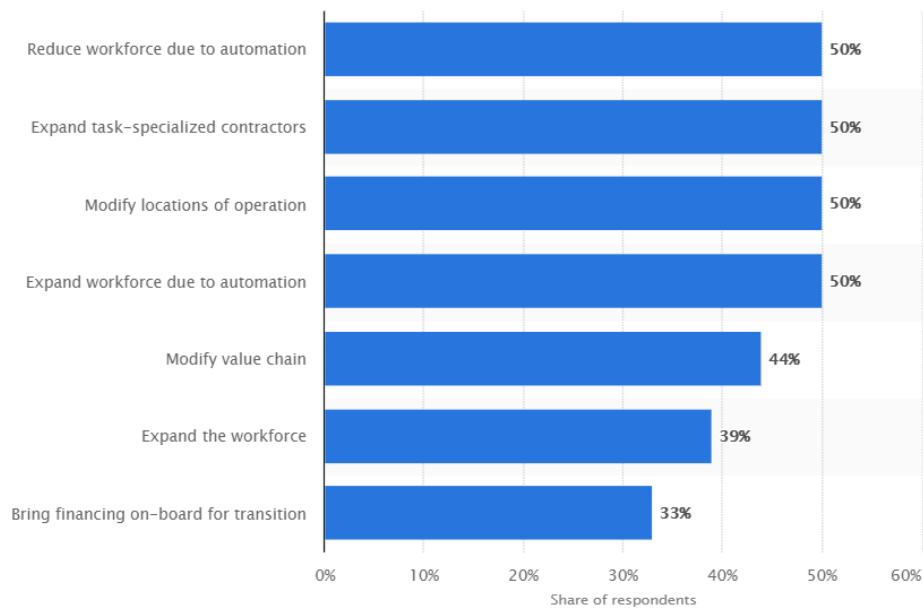


Figure 4. Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/948177/aviation-travel-tourism-impact-of-technology-worldwide/> (Expected impact of new technologies on the aviation, travel and tourism workforce worldwide between 2018 and 2022)

From the image above we can see that the ICT sector is expected to affect in a huge percentage (50%) the workforce, the task-specialized contractors and the locations of operation. Moreover, it will affect in a big amount the value chain and it will bring financing on-board for transition.

2.3 Changes that ICT has brought

The advent of the Internet and the development of ICT sector have reformed the economy of the information society and prompted the digital economy, which required a noteworthy change of the tourism industry by making new plans of action and overhauling all procedures. The tourism sector has faced a noteworthy transformation, which created new business models, there was an adjustment in the structure of distribution channels and all procedures were upgraded and this had an impact on the bundle travel providers, destinations and stakeholders.

In the new economy, all industries of monetary and public activity experienced big changes, affected by the uncommon advancement of ICT. It is appreciated,

nonetheless, that travel industry is the financial segment with the quickest developing rate and most beneficial, possessing second place globally after the petroleum sector.

In the period of globalization, the travel industry is a worldwide market, of immense size, where customers request a tremendous assortment of products and services. Tourism industry showcase in the advanced age must think about all sections, from business occasions, travel agencies, tour operators, hotels, cafés, recreation, culture and so on. (Soava, 2017)

Below are analyzed some of the most significant changes caused by information technology in tourism industry.

An expansion of the competition in the global tourism industry has constrained the tour operators to embrace the most recent innovation meaning to accomplish an aggressive edge just as a palatable development. Appropriation of the most recent mechanical patterns has likewise empowered the organizations to give effective and high-quality services. Thus, there have been noteworthy changes in the business over the previous years. For example, the new Information and Communications Technology takes into account the sightseers to have a wide scope of data giving them an assortment of goals to look over just as can pick their travel operators.

The Internet additionally has achieved an extraordinary effect on expenses and market in the travel industry. Using the new advances, the industry would now be able to fulfill their clients' refined requests through doing business sector examines to comprehend their clients' inclinations at that point consolidating innovation into their services to address these issues.

Various changes have occurred in the tourism sector because of the fuse of Information and Communication Technology into the services that tourism organizations provide. For example, the trip specialists and the travel industry organizations utilize various frameworks which are increasingly productive contrasted with the conventional ones. Before, the significant advancements which were utilized in the travel industry part were electronic subsidizes move and electronic information exchange. Be that as it may, the Small and Medium enterprises were not ready to embrace these innovations because of their high set up expenses. By and by, that has changed in the present period because of the presentation of worldwide dissemination

frameworks. This new kind of innovation empowers vacationers to acquire a gathering of data from carriers which makes it simple for them to reserve a spot just as request different services from a solitary point. (Abrahám & Wang, 2017)

In the new millennium, the role of the offline trip agent, as the primary wholesaler of the tourism services identified with deals, traveler and integral services, diminished essentially yet keeps on being still very significant as a result of the vacationer shopper assurance and monetary certification on that they award both tourists and suppliers. Be that as it may, the eventual fate of the travel industry, as indicated by assessments made by the fundamental players on the travel industry showcase, will have a place completely with the web, online organizations will be lion's share available and the travel industry will turn into the biggest business on the Internet. (Soava, 2017) Thus, conventional trip specialists are additionally gradually supplanted by the new mediators in the division, that is web-based booking servers. These new advances fill in as virtual trip specialists guaranteeing the arrangement of booking offices for occasion bundles, air travel, vehicle rentals, and inns. Some these servers are worked by the conventional tourism players like Travelocity, while others are controlled by the new contestants, for example, Microsoft with Expedia. The new contestants into the market have been pulled in by the diminished passage hindrances just as the proceeded with development of the business. (Abrahám & Wang, 2017)

There has also been a presentation of imaginative plans of action which consolidate the ideas of client advocacy and adaptable estimating. For example, TravelBids works turn around closeouts whereby the customers show their sightseeing plans and the trip specialists offer trying to fulfill their needs. In another model, Priceline, the clients are allowed the chance to mean their inclinations with the implementation of the cost. The business at that point publicizes the offering offers to carriers at that point leaves them to choose whether they can fulfill the customer's extra necessities at the costs they offer. These services have improved the likelihood of the customers' order satisfaction and have additionally prompted a decrease of correspondence and coordination cost for dealers and travelers. (Abrahám & Wang, 2017)

The below scheme shows the main changes that have been analyzed above:



2.4 Tourism websites models

In the digital era, an ever-increasing number of potential tourists enter onto numerous forums, social networks (Facebook, Tweeter, YouTube) and sites of the travel industry and counsel the remarks of other users, being more affected by their assessments (72%) than by the advertising. Along these lines, the tourism organizations have to make a flawless picture on their websites. To accomplish the reason for which it was made, the site must give an friendly interface, relevant content to users' needs, where to discover data organized about a wide scope of booking services and flight data, vehicle rentals and inns, it ought to have a reasonable indexation to make it surely understood, to draw in more guests to be anything but difficult to utilize and incorporate the legitimate connections for zones of fundamental intrigue, it must be changed and refreshed normally with the goal that it will energize, for that the clients to need to return once more.

A powerful site incorporates, other than the introduction of the traveling offers, the way to sell them, separately the possibility of the client to buy them on the web, various general tips, guides containing data on attractions, neighborhood climate, trade rates, maps, and so forth. The issue happens at the technique for installment, as there are as yet numerous clients who like to pay at the physical home office of the specialist organization, yet with execution of present day advances and gigantic

improvement of another class of travelers (third thousand years age), the online arrangement of installment starts to assume control over more ground. By utilizing hyperlinks pages, personalized multimedia brochures can be made to be accessible continuously to clients over the globe, who can discuss intelligently with the organizations to get data or to arrange costs. The travel industry endeavors additionally have the alternative of reaching customers to explain certain issues, or to illuminate them about new items, sending them regular emails to suit everybody's advantage and habits of purchasing, along these lines they persuade the client to restore the original site. (Soava, 2017)

Site and trade site advancement normally starts essentially and develops after some time with the expansion of greater usefulness and multifaceted nature as firms increase involvement with Web innovations. The overall development of sites in the travel industry and cultural tourism industry has been benchmarked utilizing 2 main models: the extended Model of Internet Commerce Adoption (eMICA) developed by Burgess and Cooper (2000) and the web site quality assessment criteria toolbox developed by Moustakis et al. (2004). (Abrahám & Wang, 2017)

Model of Internet Commerce Adoption (eMICA)

This model has three phases, speaking to three degrees of business process: digital promotion; the arrangement of data and services; and transaction handling. The principle phases of the eMICA model are outlined in Table 1.

The extended model of Internet Commerce Adoption can be connected to any webpage, including an increasingly advanced intuitive IT stage like ISAAC. The usefulness any propelled the travel industry stage may be depicted by posting and portraying its stages and layers utilizing the eMICA model. The stage could be then contrasted and different sites and platforms.

EMICA	Examples of functionality
Stage 1 – promotion	
Layer 1 – basic information	Company name, physical address and contact details, area of business
Layer 2 – rich information	Annual report, email contact, information on company activities

Stage 2 – provision	
Layer 1 – Low interactivity	Basic product catalogue, hyperlinks to further information, online enquiry form
Layer 2 – Medium interactivity	Higher-level product catalogues, customer support (e.g., FAQ, sitemaps), industry-specific value-added features
Layer 3 – High interactivity	Chat room, discussion forum, multimedia, newsletters or updates by email
Stage 3 - processing	Secure online transactions, order status and tracking, interaction with corporate servers

Source: Abrahám & Wang, 2017

Web site quality assessment criteria toolbox

The main criteria of the web site quality assessment criteria toolbox developed by Moustakis et al. (2004) are summarized in Table 2.

Criteria	Definition of the criterion
Relevance	User perception of the relevance of website's content to their inquiry and interests
Usefulness	Usefulness extends relevance to the nature of the specific inquiry. Often website administrators ask visitors to evaluate information provided using a star rating.
Reliability	Reliability is related to accuracy of information contained in the website. Often designers include a note about last update of information.
Specification	Specialization captures the specificity of information contained in the website. It contributes to website usefulness, but places a heavier burden on reliability
Architecture	Architecture concerns the way that the content is organized in a

	website, particularly the arrangement of objects, which are used to convey information to visitors
Navigability	This dimension reflects both the ease and convenience of moving in and around the site
Efficiency	Efficiency captures the technical performance characteristics of the website (e.g. is it fast? Is there advance notice of the estimated time it may take to retrieve information?)
Layout	Layout reflects the unique aspects of the website involved in the presentation of objects.
Animation	This dimension concerns the moving objects involved in the presentation of information and the website-user interaction

Source: Abrahám & Wang, 2017

The primary contrast in website quality viewpoints and site quality appraisal criteria is that the first focuses exclusively on the "specialized" attributes of site itself and on the impressions and, most importantly, fulfillment it can give its clients. Then again, the later one focuses on the "esteem included" of the sites for individuals, for example its clients (speaking to progressively "individual like issues, for example, dependability, design and productivity).

2.5 Advantages and disadvantages of technology on tourism industry

The combination of new Information and Communication Technology and Internet services into the travel industry has realized various constructive outcomes on the business. For example, it has made a brisk progression of exact data between the travel industry providers who partake in dealing with the clients' needs, mediators and the customers. The new innovation likewise takes into account effective administration and transportation of data around the world. In addition, through the arrangement of this data, the customers can likewise have simple access to booking motors to reserve a spot. Aside from reserving a spot, the sightseers can likewise think about costs from various associations and select one that is reasonable to them.

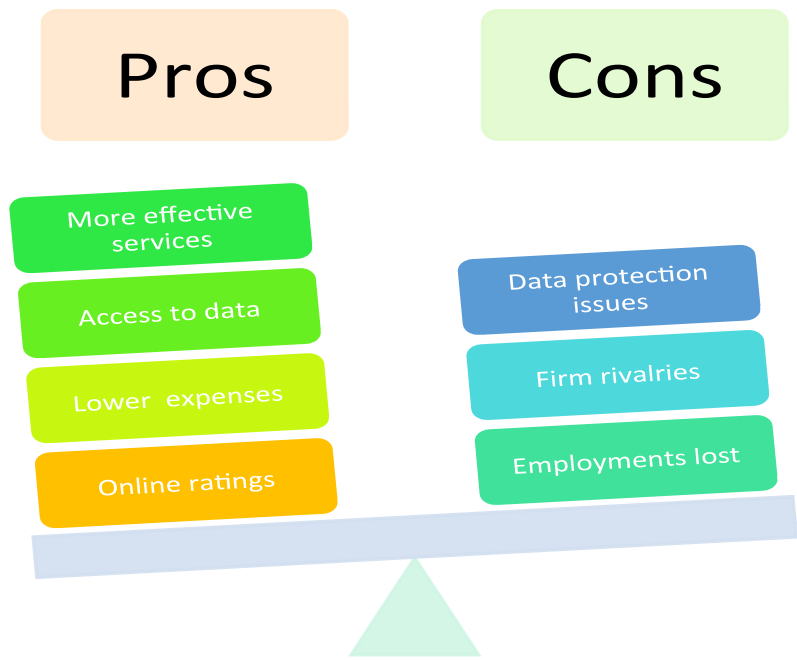
Booking motors like Orbitz and Expedia, which are accessible through online interfaces, are exploiting innovation and giving such services to customers. These booking motors likewise diminishing expenses for movement organizations through a decrease in call volume and furnishing the visitor with more command over their obtaining procedure. Direct access to data has additionally expanded the bartering intensity of the two providers and customers since the two gatherings can convey legitimately without collaborating with mediators. Along these lines, the Web takes into consideration the redesigning of the travel industry organizations through accelerating of the correspondence and the arrangement of all the significant data. (Abrahám & Wang, 2017)

Internet implies a great deal in spreading valuable data however it tends to be increasingly significant in sharing audits, sentiments and indications about spots to visit and things to see. It can likewise be significant in rating the travel industry products and enterprises, both officially and casually. More individuals depend on different rating services sites and online journals than on the official wellsprings of data and plan their excursions to different goals accordingly.

New data and innovation models empower the travel industry to examine about the client needs and inclinations. In the cutting-edge world, the client's inclinations are much of the time changing, and most customers are getting to be traitorous. In any case, with the consolidation of innovation into the business, the travel industry organizations can comprehend these changing inclinations and create administrations that meet these evolving needs. Along these lines, the web empowers the movement offices to sell benefits that are on interest henceforth expanding their incomes and helping the organizations get a focused edge in the business. Likewise, through innovation, the organizations can advance perception of the travel industry items and administrations henceforth leaving a more noteworthy impact on the potential customers contrasted with the conventional utilization of handouts, lists, and pamphlets. Therefore, the creation dissemination and administrations in the business don't depend on the quantity of printed lists any longer, and furthermore data with respect to the offices can achieve an extraordinary population of potential clients in a brief period. Appropriately, effectiveness is easily acquired in the travel industry through the utilization of new innovations to their business.

Utilization of information and technology in the tourism industry has additionally eliminated expenses for both the organizations just as the customers. For example, the customers are never again required to make pre-courses of action with the particular providers since they can simply reserve their spot on the web and save money on schedule. It has additionally made a business travel the board forms that are compelling. Throughout the far-reaching utilization of the Web, the different organizations in the business can undoubtedly bring down their expenses just as update approaches that can streamline their procedures henceforth drawing in more clients. By advancement of computerized frameworks, the expenses of going through go-betweens have additionally decreased for both the organizations and the clients.

On the other hand, with the continued advancement of technology and increase of internet use in the tourism industry, a portion of the conventional methodology are being supplanted by modernized frameworks, and therefore, people are losing employments. For example, trip specialists who go about as delegates between the movement organizations and the customers are encountering loss of occupations due to the presentation of computerized approaches that empower the travelers to put in their requests straightforwardly. Thus, the use of innovation in the business is confronting opposition from certain people subsequently constraining the administration to incorporate preparing procedures to enable the laborers to acknowledge the reception of innovation. The mix of data innovation in the travel industry part likewise requires the laborers to be prepared on the most proficient method to work the new frameworks which can be expensive. Automation of services additionally powers the business to cutback a few specialists who wind up losing their wellsprings of pay or supplant them with increasingly talented one. Besides, because of the rise of new advancements, the travel industry is encountering firm rivalries. Accordingly, the private ventures that can't bear the cost of the arrangement and support expenses of these innovations wind up losing clients prompting conclusion or creation of misfortunes. Besides, the appropriation of innovation is likewise identified with data protection issues.



3. The role of Social Media on the tourism market

3.1 The emergence of social media in the tourism industry

Social Media is a new marketing tool that lets users know their customers and prospects in ways that were not previously possible. This information and knowledge are rewarded with respect, credibility, and sincerity.

The most relevant social media platforms for a tourism business include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube. The presence on these platforms is not just about promoting the latest products, it is much more than that. A user will not use the services on a daily basis, so it is necessary for a business to become part of the discussion that users have on these platforms. Focusing on posting content that adds value to the lives of your listeners will help improve the engagement rate. (Kaur, 2017)

The rise of social media with the dawn of the millennium has offered new ways to exchange views on products and services. This led to one enormous increase in customer empowerment, with customers now having a wealth of tools that influence others with their views, recommendations or complaints. The integration of social media into global brand strategies is now a must for businesses to thrive in a smaller world where competition can be near or around the world. Social media can appear in a variety of forms, such as social networks, blogs, online channels and online reviews. (Moro & Rita, 2018)

According to Pham, P.H.M. & Gammoh, B.S., (2015), social media is so widely used that 93% of social media users believe that companies should have a social media presence. Some industry reports indicate that 49% of social media users have made a purchase decision based on the information they found through social media sites; 60% said they were likely to use social media sites to pass along information to others online; and 45% of those who searched for information via social media sites engaged in word-of-mouth.

Since the coming of social media, the travel industry and accommodation have been pioneering industries in adopting online review as a means of gaining customer feedback. Actually, the absolute most mainstream online review websites are

straightforwardly identified with the travel industry and accommodation. In particular, TripAdvisor is one of the most conspicuous substance sites that customers make, affecting countless future explorers in their choices, in this way impacting brand image and trust. (Moro & Rita, 2018)

Moreover, there is an exponentially increasing synergy among data and correspondence advances and word-of-mouth publications, particularly after 2008. Social networks such as Facebook can impact purchaser purchasing choices. Consequently, marks in a few ventures around the world, for example, the travel industry and cordiality, put resources into Facebook brand pages to build client loyalty.

Websites continue to play an important role in influencing customers, especially those that have evolved into interactive solutions, opening up space for customer feedback and e-commerce, thus benefiting from technologies developed with Web 2.0. However, new means of interaction are emerging, which are now mobile devices and applications between the dominant channels.

While conventional sites have advanced to exploit Web 2.0 innovation, different sorts of substance destinations made by clients later rose as blogs and wikis the absolute generally agent. Opinion sharing has turned out to be ordinary and, all the more as of late, interpersonal organizations have risen to end up one of the most famous agents of social media. Other related types of social media incorporate sharing photographs (for example Instagram) and recordings (e.g., Youtube) and can likewise be considered as sharing sites. (Moro & Rita, 2018)

The figure below depicts the main themes encompassed in this new social media emerged from Web 2.0:

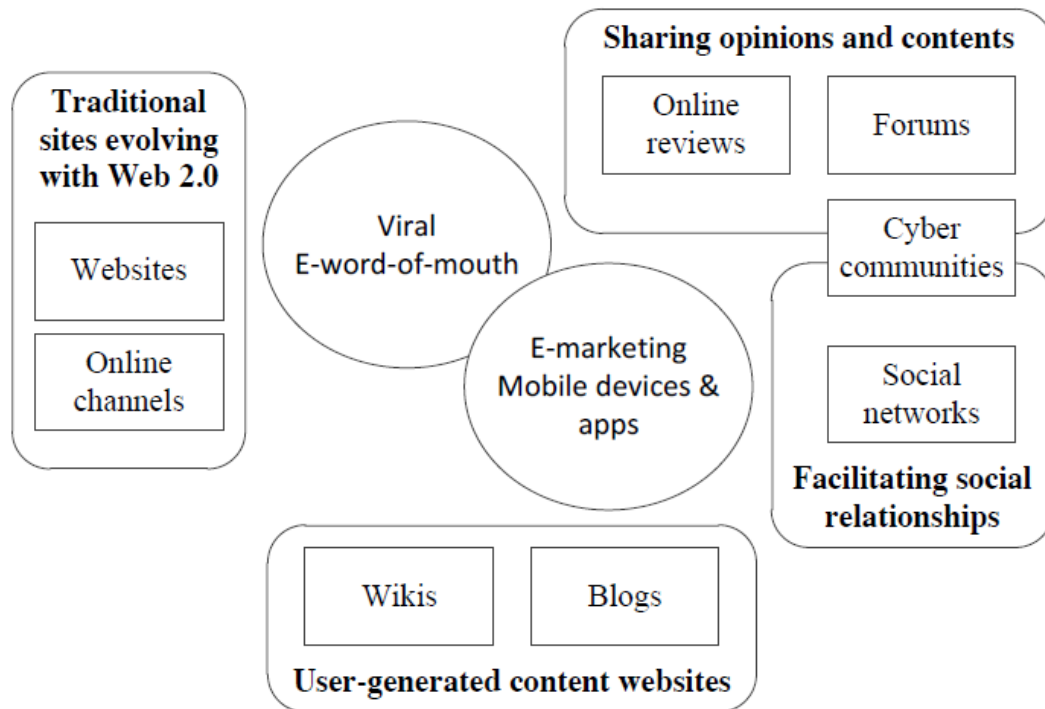


Figure 5. Source: Moro, S. & Rita, P., (2018) (Social media concepts)

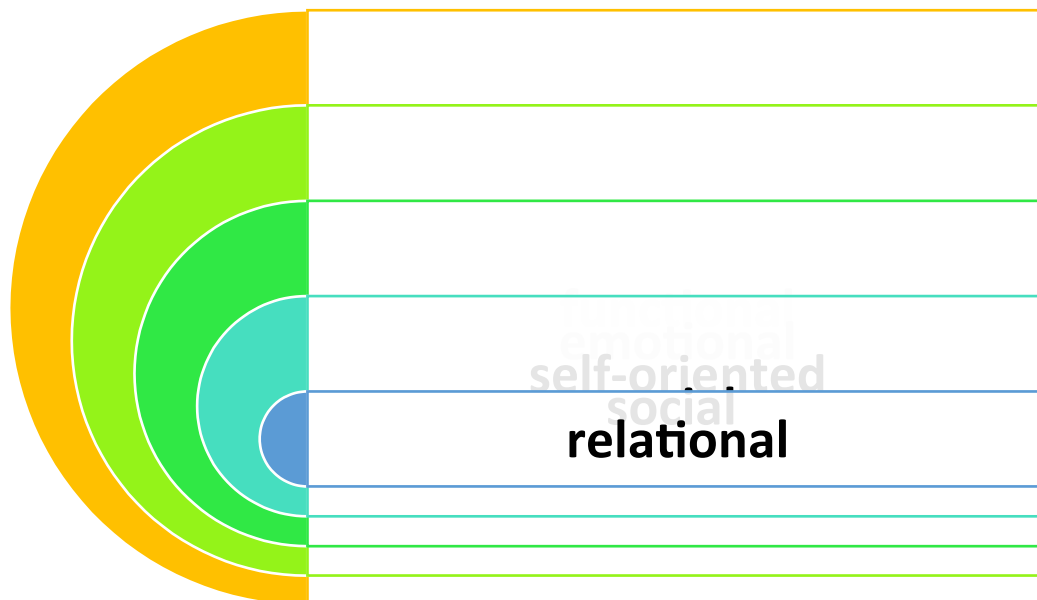
3.2 How social media works on brand management

Since they appeared, social media has begun to be a valuable tool for user interaction. Nevertheless, they have exceeded expectations in terms of customer empowerment, affecting the world market. Today, companies have to keep up with every communication channel, including social media and, in particular, those set up in the context of new interactive technologies that are ready to interact with users. (Moro & Rita, 2018)

With such a wide range of bidirectional communication channels, marketing executives are unable to control the accessibility of their marketing initiatives, are subject to the user and all viral incidents. Brand managers are scared because of the lack of control over the messages that users exchange through electronic word-of-mouth.

Many authors have assessed the relevance of social media to brand management. So according to many surveys, there are five brand management guides on social media: functional, emotional, self-oriented, social and relational. Consumers communicate

with brands through social media having as main operating motives problem solving, sending specific reviews, information search, pre-purchase service evaluation and access to specific offers and gifts for a brand. In addition, relief from personal problems / situations, feeling privileged / recognized / valued by a brand, and escaping / satisfying of curiosity are characterized as the most common emotional motivations. The main incentives included in self-orientation are self-adaptation, self-perception enhancement and self-branding. In addition, consuming a social brand is considered an exchange of experiences, community attachment, structural connections and social interaction. Finally, the relative consumption was characterized by the co-creation of the service offering, the desire for a personalized brand the interaction and the desire to know the real people behind the brand.

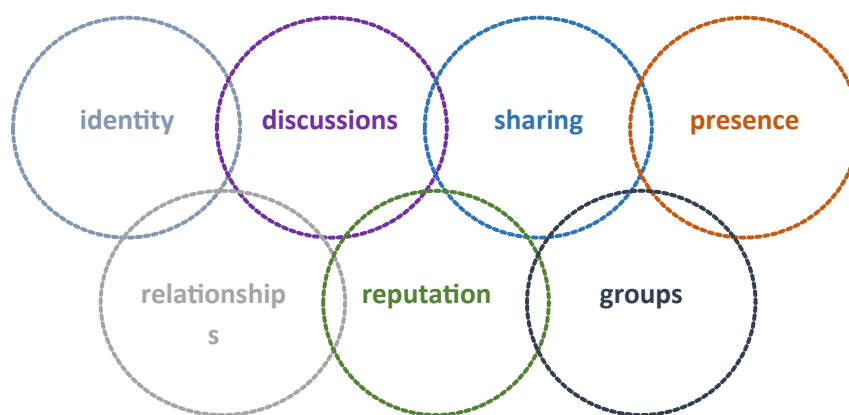


Brand managers need to tailor each brand strategy to get the most out of social media while maintaining the strategic guidelines of each company. Therefore, the prosperous development of the brand depends on this ability to adapt to the instant electronic word-of-mouth spread through an uncontrolled network of communication users and through channels.

The concept of social media is at the top of the agenda in the business world. Actually, social media play a very important role in developing and maintaining the relationship between brand and consumer, thereby providing additional marketing opportunities for brand management. In fact, the Fortune 500 companies are already

using some form of social media to reach out to consumers and they are increasingly dependent on social media to learn more about brands.

The functional building blocks of social media are the following seven: identity, discussions, sharing, presence, relationships, the reputation and the groups. These are portrayed by how much clients uncover themselves (identity), discuss with one another (conversations), exchange, disperse and get content (sharing), know if there are others (presence), relate with one another (relationships), know the economic wellbeing of others and the content (reputation), and circulate or structure networks (groups).



At the same time, according to Moro & Rita (2018), the five structures of apparent online life advertising exercises that influence client equity are: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, adaptation and word of mouth. The main develop identifies with fun utilizing the brand's social media (entertainment); the second, connection between different clients joined by the utilization of the brand's social media included objects of trade of data and trade of perspectives (interaction); the third construct represented the advanced features of the brand's social media, including elements explaining trendiness; the fourth speaks to custom responsibility for media, with customized data and how to scan for data (adjustment) and the last incorporated the client's intention to spread data showed on the brand's internet based life (word of mouth).

Brands can act as legitimate relationship partners. Emotional relationships or brand relationships that are influential actually develop in online social communities. These emotional relationships develop from the consumer's attachment to a brand. This connection can lead to an emotionally based association and commitment, that is, emotional commitment, as well as faith in the form of market behavior.

Given the social and networked nature of social media, it is an ideal environment for brand communities. In fact, branded communities based on social media have not only shown positive results in community indicators and value creation practices, but also to enhance brand trust and loyalty.

With regard to online brand communities, there are five unique dimensions, namely the social context, structure, scale, content and storytelling, and affiliated brand communities. Within the social media (social context), communication is richer than just text-based, but poorer than face-to-face offline communication. In virtual communities, members are often categorized (structured) based on the number of comments and ratings they receive from other members, thereby allowing for the status of "highly engaged consumers" and thus recognizing certain "rights" in the community. Although most of the online virtual communities do not exceed ten thousand members (scale), some reach millions, making communities great. In addition, brands usually play a central role in the consumption of relevant stories (content and narrative) for the purpose of conveying information. Finally, it is common to find sub-brand joint ventures (affiliate brand communities) that are promoted by enthusiastic brands or business segments.

Engaging in social media brand communities greatly increases the amount of consumer spending and user-generated content has a stronger impact than content produced by the marketer on consumer behavior. In addition, the emergence of social media has changed the role of consumers from the passive listener to a more active participant.

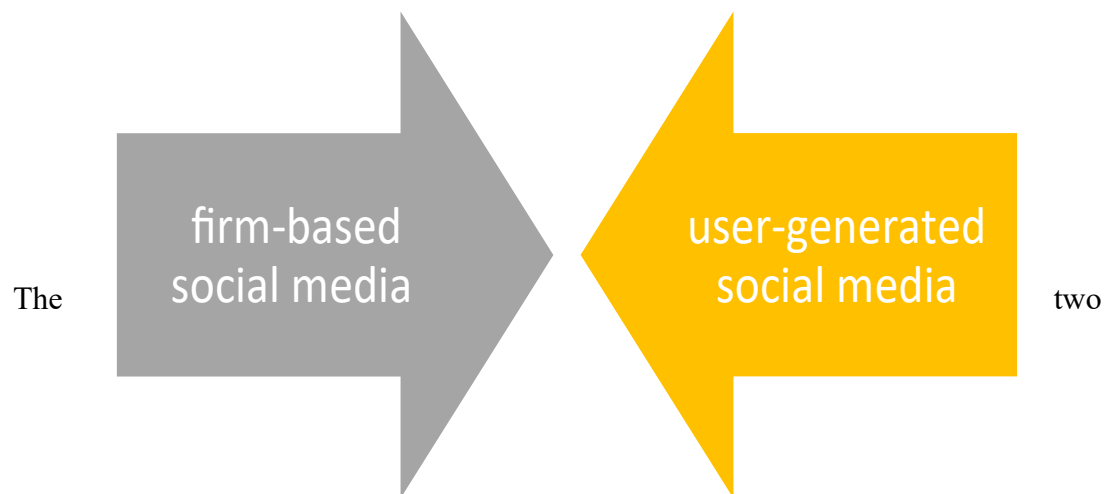
When creating brand-related consumer activities, Internet users interact, express, share, and make content. As an outcome of the new powerful customer networks and the easy of sharing brand encounters inside them, purchasers are getting to be significant brand stories makers that impact brand execution.

Social media activities and user interactions impact brand discernment as well as impact purchaser buying choices. Actually, captivating with a person to person communication fan page positively affects customer awareness, word of mouth activities and market expectation. Making brand fan pages on social networking sites is one approach to advance client relationships. Brand postings posted by organizations create likes and comments from brand followers, influencing the brand's fame. This measurement is improved by setting the brand name at the highest point of the brand's fan page and concentrating on live and intelligent brand highlights. (Moro & Rita, 2018)

3.3 Social media and tourism marketing

Today, information is disseminated faster through social networking sites (SNSs) than any other medium. As a result, tourism establishments, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) or official tourism organizations promote tourism using various strategies through the SNS. Not only do social media present information to the outside world, but it also increases the credibility of the organization. Studies reveal that "social media overview" is an important aspect of e-wom and plays a vital role in the client's decision-making process. Many companies use social media as marketing tools for products and services. Therefore, with an important place in tourism marketing, social media cannot be ignored. (Rashmiranjan & Priykrushna, 2018)

Online social media is a unique stage that is participatory and conversational. It has various components that make a virtual network of individuals with a typical reason, guided by some unwritten approaches going through the PC framework. Two-way client and business commitment make social media a significant component of the marketing mix.



forms of communication of the social media, namely the corporate base and the generation of users, outweighed the traditional means of communication. In company-based social media communication, companies and business organizations control the content, engage consumers, influence consumer perceptions and knowledge about their audience. TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet are the most important social media sites that provide information about hotels around the world and bring consumers together in a single discussion forum. User-generated content (UGC) on social media is the most effective means of communication where the number of users is larger, and the penetration field is larger than the previous one. In this medium, the content is created, circulated and managed by the user without commercial intent and communication is made directly between the consumers. UGC speeds up communication. This plays an important role in branding, customer retention and placement. Facebook, Twitter, Google+ YouTube are UGC's most widely used social media platforms for communicating information, where users share their own experiences, suggestions, and so on.

The portrayal of data is the principle part of social media through collaboration and interactive correspondence with other media. The substance of the travel industry associations via social media is for the most part portrayed as visitor goal data, promotion of events (the travel industry centered), limited time offers to pull in more clients, advancement of their own site and advancement of other site and so on. (Rashmiranjan & Priyakashna, 2018)

3.4 Sharing tourism experiences

Because as we have seen in the previous section, user-generated social media has particular power in the tourism sector, in this section we will focus on this part and specifically on sharing tourism experience.

The Internet has transformed the tourist experience both in planning a trip, during and after it. In particular, various scientific studies show that the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TripAdvisor allow travelers to share their knowledge and experiences to interact with. In addition, these joint activities represent a new element in creating meaningful tourism experiences. It is important that when travelers share their experiences through social media, their friends can "see" and experience the journeys of travelers without being physically together.

In addition, the impact of awareness or part of different social circles makes it possible to create new forms of communication that can lead to new concepts or interpretations in a tourism experience. The tourist experience is not only about the duration of the journey, but also the results from dreams, gathering information for a future trip and reminiscing about a previous trip. Thus, travelers are not passive consumers of information, but information creators, publishers, and distributors, who in turn lead to co-creation from their own experiences.

It is a fact that the use of social media can affect tourism, perceptions and (re) interpretations of places, activities and people. Indeed, social media such as social networking sites and online travel communities have the power to change the tourism experience throughout the journey; furthermore, they can provide new post-travel experiences by reinforcing meaning (or potential reinterpretations) of the trip.

The impact of social media on the tourism experience can be better understood by taking into account the nature of the interaction between media and people, which has been studied in the field of psychology, sociology and communication. Specifically, social builders show a dialectical process: human relationships are based on personal experiences, people concentrate knowledge in a social context that is then enjoyed by humans. Therefore, it is claimed that people organize their social life in order to find new aspects of who they are as human beings.

Since social media allows travelers sharing their experiences very quickly, it must be viewed as that it could be a significant middle person (ie an agent) that truly adds to the creation of the tourism experience. Specifically, "enjoying" one's involvement by sharing experience and knowledge (via travel photos, videos) can be a key capacity of online networking. Along these lines, the verbal and/or non-verbal articulation of one's feelings inside a system of companions recovers rationally interceded reactions to their past experiences. Consequently, voyagers' utilization of web-based life after an excursion is viewed as an approach to reproduce (and potentially reproduce) their experiences with other individuals.

There are various effects of the exchange of experiences, such as highlighting positive / negative emotion, offering emotional support, providing self-esteem and triggering sensation. For example, some studies show that the exchange of positive events leads the narrator (i.e. the traveler) to experience greater positive affect compared to non-allocation; further, the description of the tragic accident can relieve painful feelings and thus lead to personal well-being. Other studies have found that simply setting up positive consumer experiences can enhance user satisfaction and future brand confidence. It is also found that providing intellectual processes for the exchange of experiences offers extensive benefits resulting from "learning".

However, it is important to keep in mind not only where (that is, a channel or source) there is something to be said, but also how experiences are shared. Other researchers suggest that certain social media features are "forcing" individuals to change the way they share experiences, where people can express their thoughts or feelings by simply updating their status or changing their photo on the wall, dramatic "result in which friends actually share experiences."

3.5 Influencer marketing in tourism

In recent years, social media platforms such as Facebook have built up their display algorithm such that makes it progressively hard for advertisers to show up organically on consumer social media feeds. Simultaneously, purchasers are embracing advertisement blocking software at an expanding rate, while simultaneously feeling progressively shelled with data. This feeds into the requirement for separating data and energizes the rise of a customary two-step progression of data, with public

officials altering the data and spreading messages to a more extensive, devoted group of spectators. These sentiment heads are reliable individuals who offer guidance and impact the assessment of others. In the context of social media, these opinion leaders are usually called key opinion leaders or just influencers. (Gretzel, 2018)

Due to Gretzel, influencers are people who have the ability to impact the choices of others due to their (genuine or perceived) control, knowledge, position or relationship. Marketers have been working with influencers for a long time. Traditionally, these influencers were celebrities and used in advertising to endorse products. The benefits of celebrity endorsements are in terms of public understanding, added credibility, increased ad recall, synergies between the product brand and the celebrity's personal brand, as well as increased brand recognition. The importance of wealth for tourism marketing is due to the fact that image and destination awareness can be significantly affected by their approvals. The impact of these traditional celebrities on tourism advertising has been well documented (McCartney & Pinto, 2014; Van der Veen & Song, 2014; Yen & Teng, 2015).

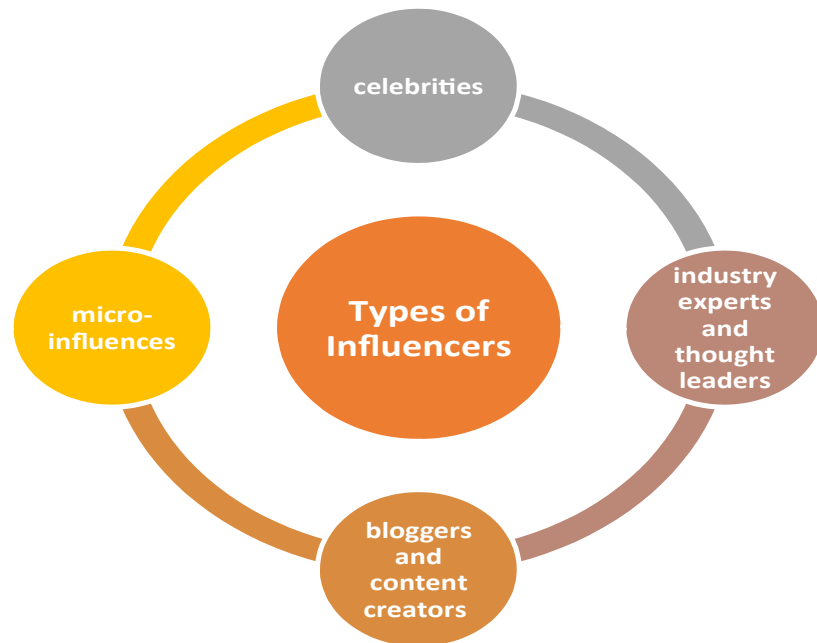
While celebrities continue to influence the social media users, social media has also produced so-called domestic influencers or micro-celebrities who have managed to create a piece through their binding and relevant content. Unlike the big celebrities who create celebrity value through exclusivity, the social media of the little celebrities establish their value through authenticity and connection. Some of these social media stars end up becoming dominant celebrities. Both celebrities and micro-celebrities are progressively being utilized by advertisers to spread messages to focused crowds via social media; this practice is referred to as influencer marketing. (Gretzel, 2018)



Figure 6. Source: <https://econsultancy.com/impressive-influencer-marketing-campaigns/> (11 impressive influencer marketing campaigns)

According to Krasniak (2016), the most important platforms on which marketers employ influencer marketing are: 1. Instagram (used by 89% of marketers engaged in influencer marketing); 2. Facebook and Twitter (both used by 70% of marketers); 3. Youtube (59%); 4. Blogs (48%); and, 5. Snapchat (45% of marketers).

Not all influencers are equivalent. Advertisers generally divide influencers into the following categories: 1) celebrities; 2) industry experts and thought leaders. 3) bloggers and content creators and 4) micro-influences. Current research demonstrates that while uber influencers have an enormous range; little influencers counterbalance their littler range through more noteworthy pertinence and reverberation, prompting a lot higher cooperation rates. There are also influences on the site that focus on explicit subjects, for example, players and mother bloggers that emphasize on adapting their social media activities, while little servers are regularly not fundamentally determined by fiscal prizes. In this way, deciding the privilege influencer for an influencer advertising effort is totally critical to its prosperity. (Gretzel, 2018)



The importance of influencer marketing is shown by some strong statistics. For instance, 40% of a search's respondents have purchased an item after seeing it used by an influencer on Instagram, Twitter, Vine or YouTube (Swant, 2016). The same research also found that Twitter users reported 5.2 times increase in purchase intent when exposed to both brand and influencer tweets about the product. In accordance with these findings, MarketingDIVE (Kirkpatrick, 2016) reports that influencer marketing campaigns have the ability to achieve 11 times more return on investment than traditional advertising.

The 5 most important reasons why marketers use influencers in their marketing strategy are (Gretzel, 2018):

- ✓ Improving brand loyalty
- ✓ expanding brand recognition
- ✓ reaching new targeted audiences
- ✓ increasing voice share
- ✓ improving sales conversion

Travel marketers have seen the strong potential of message amplification and targeting reach by travel social media influencers. They started working with bloggers early on as blogs rapidly became significant data sources for travel stakeholders and therefore valuable media for marketers. The promise of travel perks as well as the

ability to combine an individual's identified brand with desirable tourism brands makes travel industry an attractive target for influencers. One challenge that both travel marketers and influencers have is how to communicate authenticity when influencers are compensated for their contents.

3.6 Pros and cons of social media in the travel industry

Starting with the advantages that social media have in tourism, we can divide them into three main categories: for tourist destinations, for the tourists and for the businesses.

Tourist destinations

- **Development of the destinations:** This is on the grounds that the freedom of destination has increased, which can be displayed on the Internet in all markets and not dependent on travel agencies.
- **Creation of new destinations:** Due to unlimited internet access and abundant information, tourists can discover unknown and forgotten places, thereby contributing to regional development and creating new destination trends.
- **Low cost advertising:** Through social media, all destinations can be promoted easily and without any further cost.

Tourists

- **Wide access:** Via Internet all the tourist consumers have unlimited access to information, and they can search for any destination of tourism service they want.
- **User friendly:** It is widely known that social media platforms are made to be very friendly and accessible by user, so they can use them easily.
- **Direct communication:** Consumers have the ability to contact each tourism provider directly through a message at any time.
- **Cost effectiveness:** Users don't have to come in contact with agencies in order to take the necessary information about a destination, a hotel or a service. They can easily access all the data free, visiting their social media page.

Businesses

- **Wide accessibility:** Via social media, any business can reach huge audience from any place in the earth. The only thing they have to do, is to create a page in social media platforms.
- **Competitive advantage:** Businesses which have presence in social media, follow the current trends and tend to improve their image.
- **Free promotion:** Through social media, businesses can promote their products/services without any cost.
- **Better understanding of customer needs:** Due to the customer feedback that we can take from social media, organizations can more easily understand consumers' needs and adapt in them.
- **Reliability:** Social media offer each travel industry business the chance to build up a channel of correspondence with forthcoming customers. This implies they can take care of their potential issues before choosing not to utilize the services they give. The capacity to interface by and by with the business and the buyer has now turned out to be extremely simple and modest.

However, except of the advantages have been described above, there are some disadvantages, too. Some of them are:

- **Security issues:** It is a significant issue that has been very busy with the tech community lately. There are many implications that personal data are leaked and personal privacy being.
- **No human contact:** Human contact inspires greater trust and security instead of impersonal internet transactions. This is more common for older people because they have not grown up with technology, it is more difficult to fully adapt to new technologies and to be trampled on by staff.
- **Non-direct contact with the product:** One of the biggest disadvantages of using e-commerce is the fact that the customer is not able to personally examine and feel the product before choosing it.

4. The case of Thessaloniki

4.1 About Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki, also known as Salonika, is the second biggest city in Greece and one of the most established in Europe. The city was established in 315 BC. by King Kassandra of Macedonia and was initially named after Alexander the Great's sister. It didn't take long for Thessaloniki to turn into a significant focus and probably the biggest city during this period. The Byzantine time frame was critical to the city as it developed and developed holy places and different structures, just as cautious developments. In 1403 Thessaloniki was involved by the Ottomans.

The key significance of the city, due to its established trade routes and its various trade and commercial activities has again turned into a significant focus around there. The city endured the most exceedingly awful catastrophe in 1917 because of a significant fire that wrecked the greater part of the downtown area. A couple of years after the fact, Thessaloniki got huge quantities of displaced people because of the Asia Minor fiasco in 1922 and the trading of populace with Turkey, which likewise had a huge financial and social effect on the city. The destruction was followed by many side effects in the city's activities in the following years. Thessaloniki was constructed and transformed in the 0's and 60's, to take the form it has today. (inthessaloniki.com)

Thessaloniki is the second largest city in Greece and the capital of the district of Central Macedonia, with all the structures forming a modern urban center with a population of over 1,000,000 inhabitants in the regional unit. In addition, its port is Greece's second largest trading port and its location near the Balkans, between the East and the West, are important contributors to both its economic growth and its cosmopolitan features. The European Center for the Development of Vocational Education (Cedefop), the Black Sea Commercial and Development Bank, is based in Thessaloniki along with the Fathers Institute of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Thessaloniki provides a combination of natural, built and cultural *attractions*. The city is coastal; thus its seafront offers a great view. Also, as a historical center has a variety of monuments and religious buildings (e.g. Rotunda, Arch of Galerius, White Tower, Roman Forum Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's house etc.). Amongst its numerous

museums Archeological Museum, Museum of Byzantine Culture, Museum of White Tower, Atatürk's Museum and Jewish Museum stand out. (Thessaloniki.travel)

The symbol of the city is the White Tower. It dominates the beach and now houses, as a museum, magnificent collections concerning the Byzantine history of Thessaloniki. It was built in 1500 AD. about and was part of the city's defense system.

Thessaloniki is a modern city that has maintained its human face. The contemporary element blends in with the history as it is depicted in the archaeological sites, in its Byzantine churches, in its interesting monuments. The city is vibrant all the time of the day, and especially in the evening it gets a different color, as the city is known for its quality entertainment. (visitgreece.gr)

The city is easy to explore. You can go anywhere in about 30 minutes. A modern international airport is just 15 km away. To the east, a train station is within walking distance of the city center, buses and taxis are reliable and cheap - everything in Thessaloniki makes you feel at ease. The climate is no exception: typical Mediterranean with summer summers, mild winters and an average of 300 days of annual sunshine.

Fifty-eight airlines travel to 141 destinations in 41 countries from Macedonia International Airport. The airport has been operating with frequent connections to most Greek cities and islands since 1930 serving more than 2.5 million passengers annually.

Its strategic location on the Egnatia Highway - linking East to West - and in the heart of Macedonia, in northern Greece, adjacent to four countries, makes the city easily accessible to travelers from almost every corner of the world.

Although the colorful and vibrant city feels both European and oriental, it has a long tradition of security and hospitality, visitors in their thousands visit here for business or pleasure all year - among them several important politicians, artists, and academics. (Thessaloniki Convention Bureau)

4.2 Tourism account about last year

According to Gregory Tassios, the President of the Hellenic Hoteliers Federation, tourism in northern Greece remained stable in 2018 but without the increase noticed in southern Greece.

2018 was a year for Northern Greece, moving at the same level as 2017. It did not have the 5 to 10% increase observed in southern Greece. In fact, there was a decrease (about 10%) of arrivals from Russia, but this was covered by arrivals of British and Germans. The number of arrivals from the Balkan countries has remained constant, however, for the 110 days, that is, the summer season.

The characteristic, however, this year was that there was Balkan mobility towards short-term leasing. Apart from the two main airports of Northern Greece, Thessaloniki and Kavala, this year for the first time showed an increase in international arrivals to the Ioannina Airport from Israel, Cyprus and Scandinavia.

In terms of city tourism, there was a 15% drop in Turkish tourists to Thessaloniki, Kavala and Ioannina, and in particular to Alexandroupolis it could reach 30%. However, in Thessaloniki and Ioannina the Israel increase reached 200%, which offset the decline observed by the Turkish.

At the same time, Alexander Thanos, Deputy Mayor for Tourism and Culture of the Central Region of Macedonia states that the Region closed in 2018 with a particularly positive outlook for its tourist year. According to official data so far, arrivals grew by 20.6% for the first half of 2018, demonstrating once again the momentum in the tourism sector. In 2018, the District Administration has insisted on its strategic goal of extending its tourism season, promoting and promoting its alternative tourism product. Particular emphasis was given to the areas of Culture, the promotion of alternative activities, the promotion of the special gastronomy and products produced by the Macedonian land, the attraction and organization of large conferences and the support of Tourism professionals with a specific network of synergies present in over 20 International Exhibitions Abroad.

The promotion of the ecumenical personalities of Aristotle and Alexander the Great, the certification of the cultural path of the Apostle Paul's steps by the Council of Europe, the promotion of Olympus and its emergence as a national brand name for

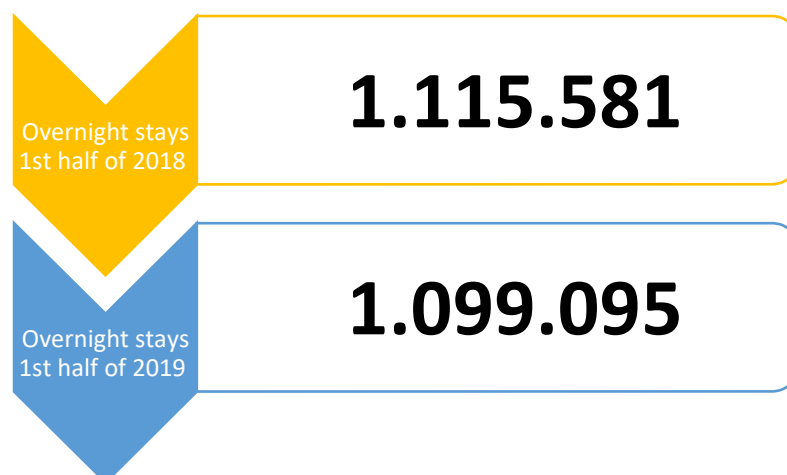
alternative tourism, its organization World Conference on the Silk Road of the World Tourism Organization are some of the key features of our strategy last year. Among them was the launch of the "Macedonian Cuisine Bus" from the Philoxenia Exhibition with its first destination on the squares of Central Europe and the Balkans.

Finally, the establishment of the Central Macedonian Film Office for the first time has helped to develop a large and dynamic market, such as the production of audiovisual media, which will create the conditions for our Region to expand even further abroad. (makthes.gr)

4.3 Thessaloniki tourism in numbers

Overnight stays at hotels in Thessaloniki fell in the first half of 2019, according to statistics released by the Thessaloniki Hoteliers Association for Greek and foreign tourists.

The number of overnight stays as shown by hotel members of the Thessaloniki Hoteliers Association appears to have dropped by 16,485. Specifically, in the first half of 2019 there were 1,099,095 overnight stays while in the corresponding period of 2018 the overnight stays reached 1,115,581.



As for Greek voters, there was a decrease of 4.54%, which is attributed to some extent to the May and June European Elections and Local Government Elections, although the downward trend was already evident in them. first months of the year.

Another factor that significantly influenced the image of overnight stays in Thessaloniki during the first half of the year was the sharp increase in overnight stays of refugees and immigrants from Asian countries and especially from Afghanistan participating in the International Migration Programs. Total sleepover is estimated at 24,373 nights.

As for the main nationalities visiting the city, Israel visitors took first place for the second consecutive year, posting a rise of 7.885 in the first half of 2019 compared to the same period in 2018. Specifically, overnight stays of Israelis reached 64.247 at the period January - June 2018.

The Cypriots remained in second place for another year but recorded a decrease of 16.41% in their overnight stays compared to the corresponding period of 2018. Their number of overnights was 64.003.

In third place are still the Germans, whose nights have risen by 2.09%. Specifically, from January to June this year, 40.186 overnight stays were recorded, compared to 39.364 recorded in the first half of 2018.

In the fourth from fifth place the USA climbed with the nights of the Americans to increase by 7.46%. Specifically, from 33.494 that was January - June 2018 amounted to 35.992 this year.

A decrease of 14.07% and a decrease of 14.07% were recorded by the Thessaloniki Hoteliers Association over the nights of Italian visitors which fell from 34.026 in the first half of 2018 to 29.240 in the same period this year.

Significant increase of 9.61% overnight stays of Bulgarian visitors to Thessaloniki climbing from seventh to sixth place. Specifically, they increased from 25.407 in the first half of 2018 to 26.752 in the corresponding period of 2019.

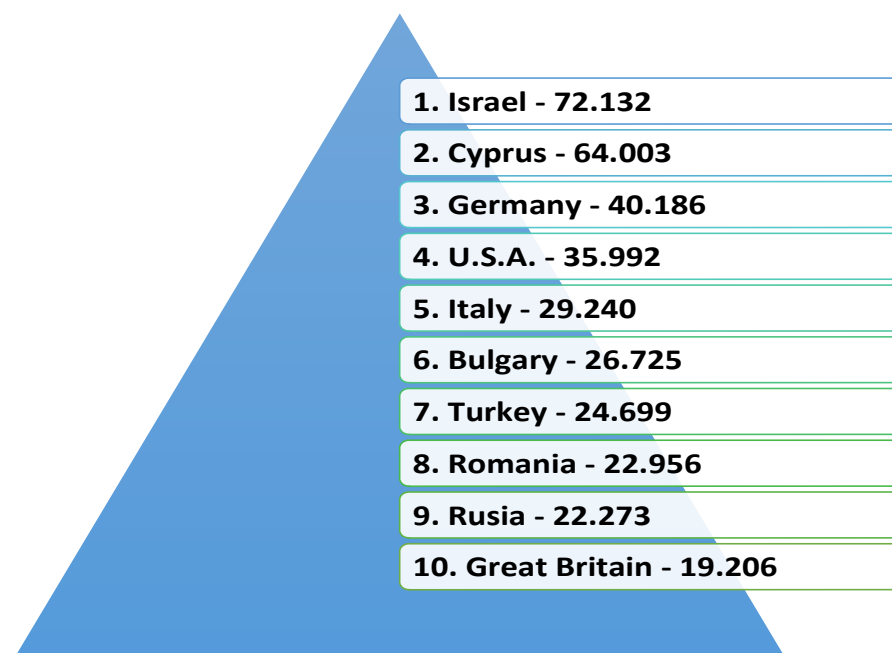
The Turkish tourists' overnight stays are down by 20.30%, as in the first half of 2019 there were 24.699 overnight stays compared to the same period in 2018 when

overnight stays of 30 neighboring countries were recorded. Turkey ranked seventh on the list of top 20 countries in overnight nationalities.

Eighth from ninth place Romanian overnight stays rose 2.25% to 22.956 overnight stays for the first half of 2019 compared to 22.541 in 2018.

One night fell Russian overnight stays, which fell 5.55%. Specifically, this year's figure stood at 22.273 versus 23.538 in the same period in 2018.

Visitors from Great Britain, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland remain in the tenth position, however, falling by 8.55%. Specifically, in the first half of 2019 there were 19,206 overnight stays compared to 21.001 in the same period in 2018. In the eleventh position, Serbian visitors remain with 6.34% decrease from 19.974 in the first half of 2018 to 18.708.



Survey data carried out on a monthly basis by tourism and research firm GBR Consulting on behalf of the Thessaloniki Hoteliers Association show that in the first half of 2019 there was an increase in the average room rate (ARR) of 2.6%. A marginal increase of 1.8% was also recorded in RevPar (revenue per room available) which stood at € 50.33.

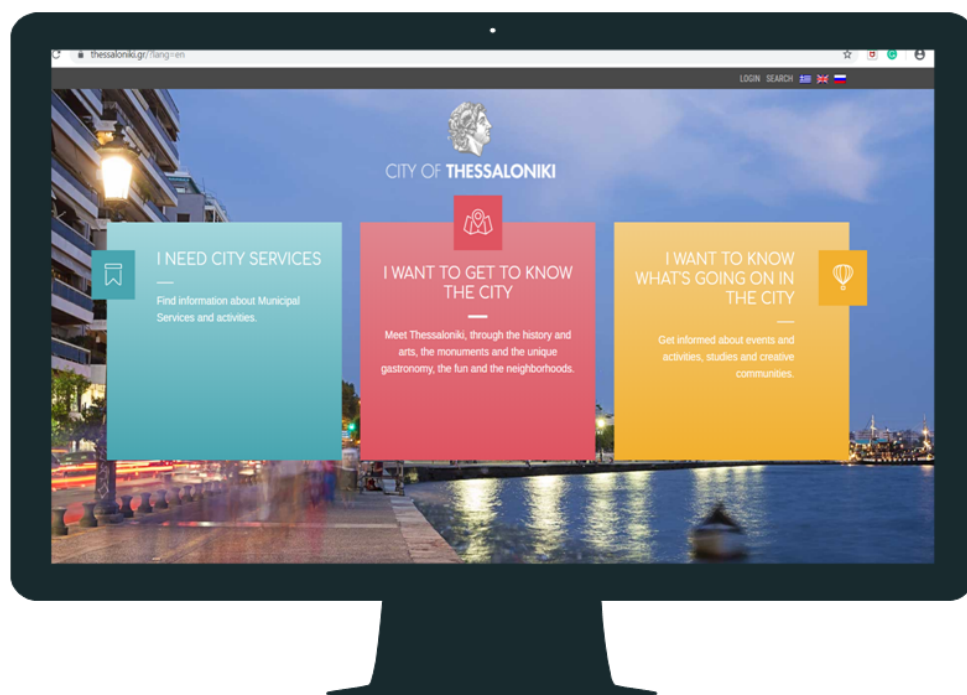
However, in benchmarking between Thessaloniki and the other ten corresponding European cities (Antwerp, Birmingham, Cologne, Dusseldorf, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Budapest, Hamburg, Manchester, Salzburg, Salzburg, Salzburg), Thessaloniki remains last regarding the completion, the revenues and the room rate. (TourismPress)

4.4 Thessaloniki Online Presence

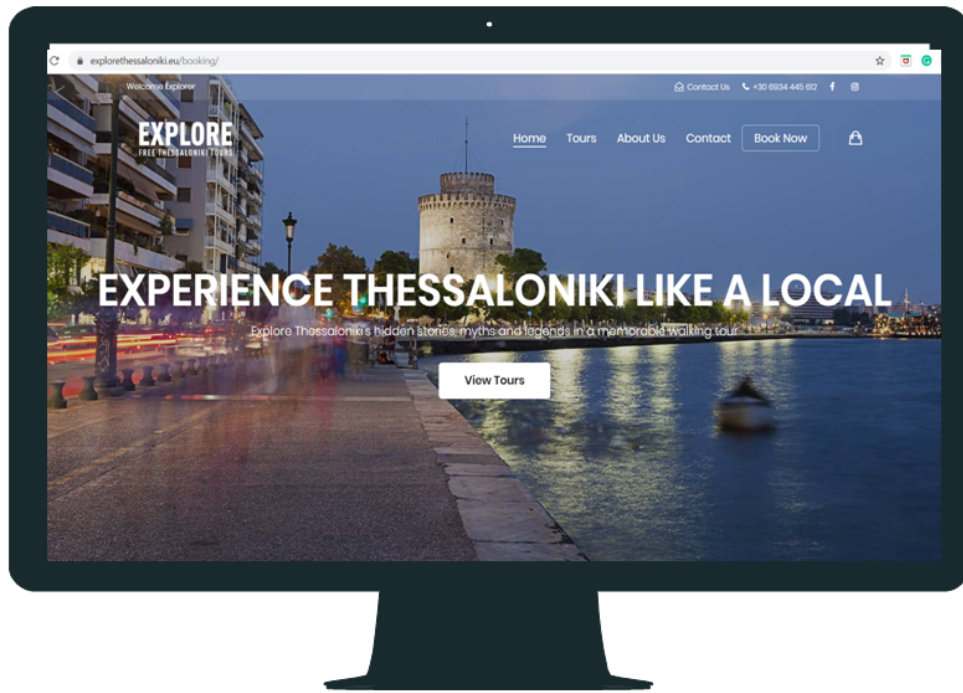
Undoubtedly, Thessaloniki has made great steps towards the digital age in recent years. Both citizens and executives have been working hard to get the city a digital image.

The first step to digitizing is a **website**. Thus, Thessaloniki has numerous presentation sites in the city but also in the form of a tourist guide. Listed below are some of the most common.

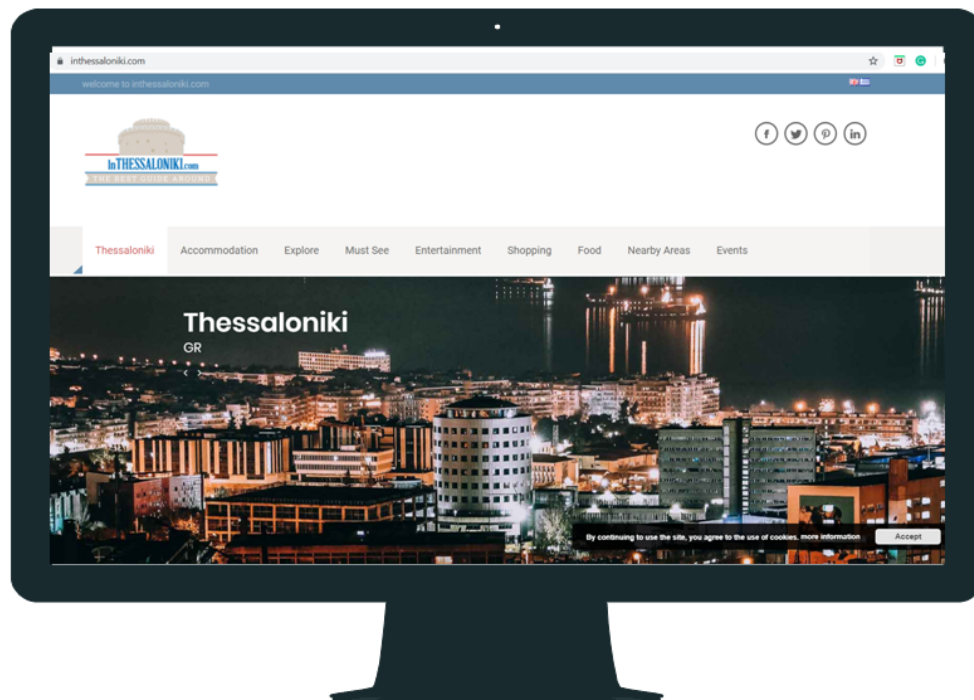
- 1) **thessaloniki.gr**: This is the official website of the municipality of Thessaloniki, which has been created to facilitate both the city's residents and tourists. Specifically, it provides residents with information on municipal services as well as a range of digital services such as electronic filing, licenses and license applications. On the other hand, it contains a comprehensive guide for tourists on sightseeing, gastronomy, nightlife, accommodation, monuments, education and much more.



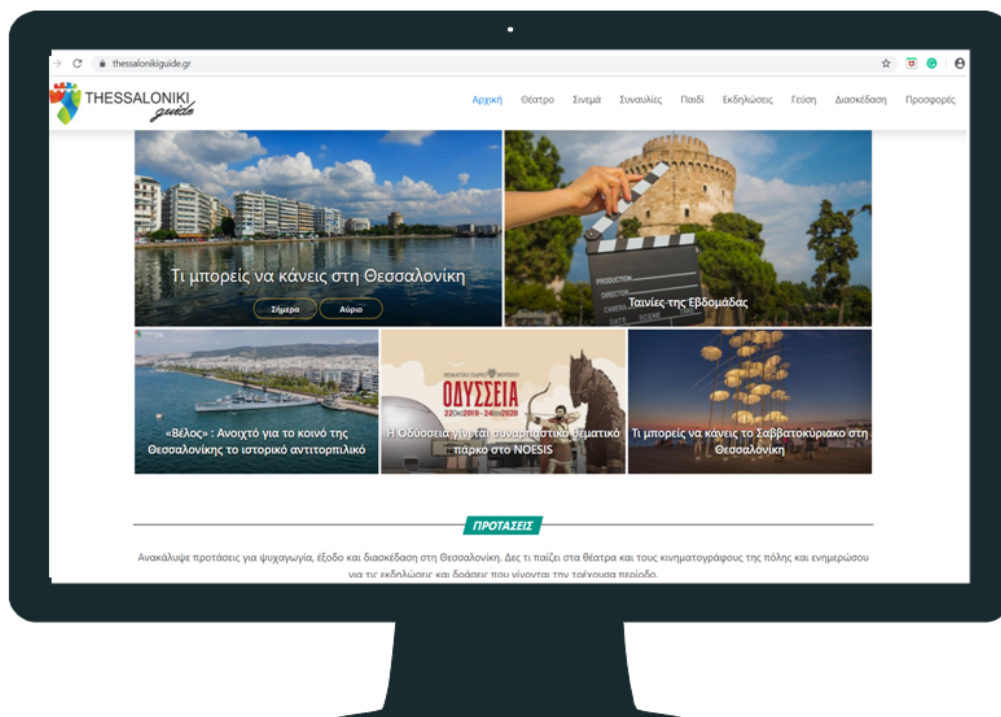
- 2) **explorethessaloniki.eu:** ExploreThessaloniki was founded in September 2016, with purpose to showcase the beauty of Thessaloniki to every visitor. It gives tourists the possibility to book online a free tour to popular spots in the city.



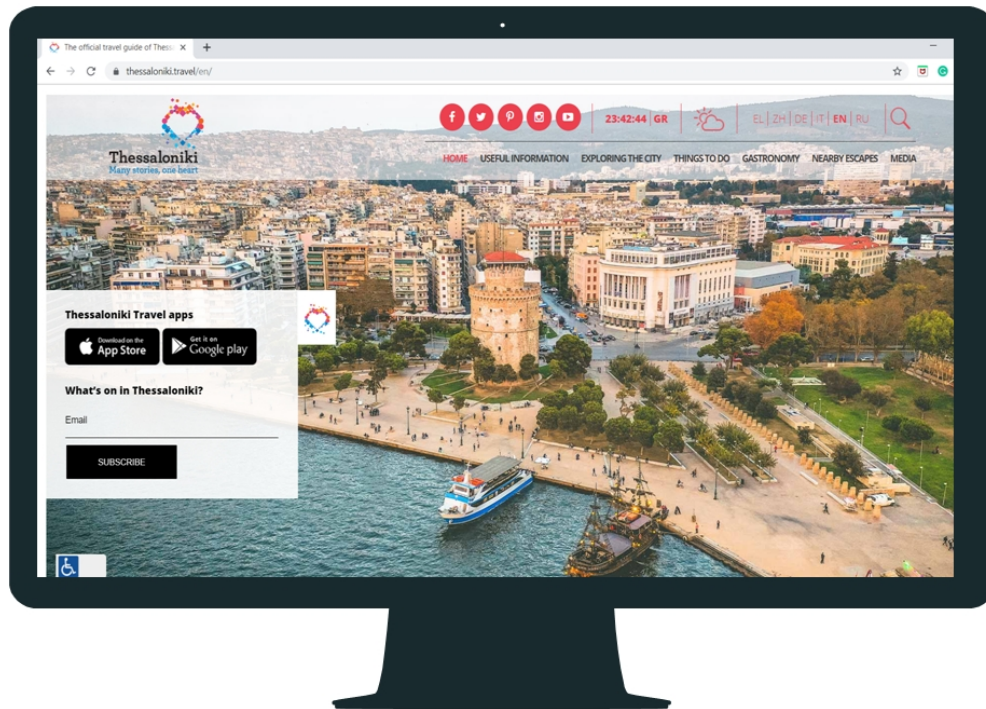
- 3) **inthessaloniki.com:** This website is exclusively in the form of a tourist guide providing information on accommodation, culture, monuments, museums, churches, entertainment, events, food and shopping.



- 4) **thessalonikiguide.gr:** This site focuses more on the cultural side, providing information on cinemas, theaters, events and concerts. It is mainly aimed at domestic visitors as the site language is Greek.



- 5) **thessaloniki.travel:** This is the organization that we will focus most in this chapter. It is the official tourist guide of the city, created by the Municipality of Thessaloniki, in order to advertise the destination of Thessaloniki, design a tourist brand, highlight the strategic advantages of the city, promote the tourist profile of the area.

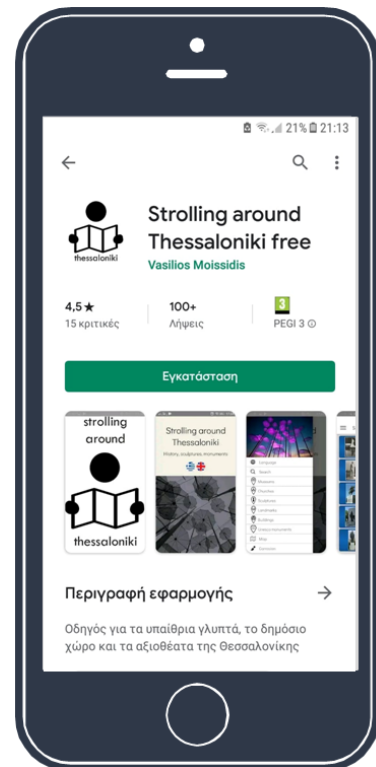


Except websites, another way to promote a city and highlight its hotspots is online applications (apps). More specifically, apps offer users the opportunity to easily have in their mobile phones all the necessary information about a city they want to travel.

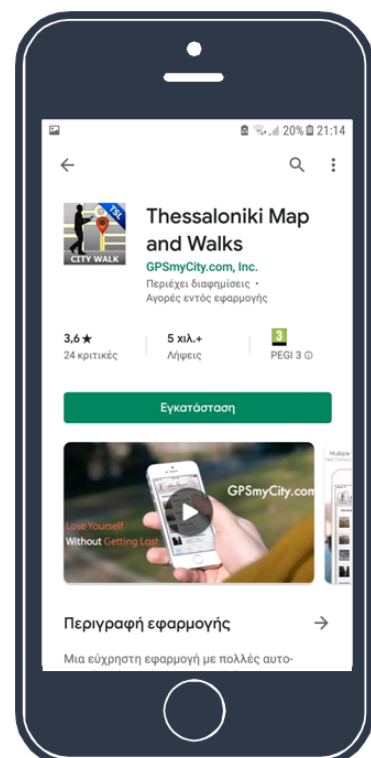
There are many respective apps about Thessaloniki such as:

1) **Strolling around Thessaloniki free.** Strolling Around Thessaloniki is an application that can be used as a city guide for outdoor sculptures, public spaces and Thessaloniki attractions.

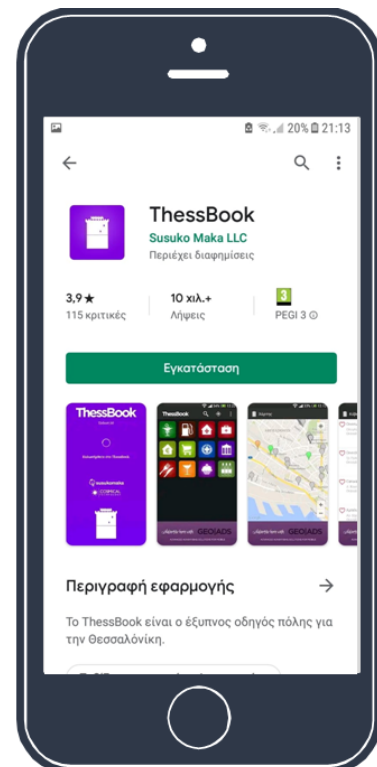
It is aimed at tourists, visitors and art lovers who would like to browse through public sculpture, monuments and sights of the city and have access to artistic information, material and historical context.



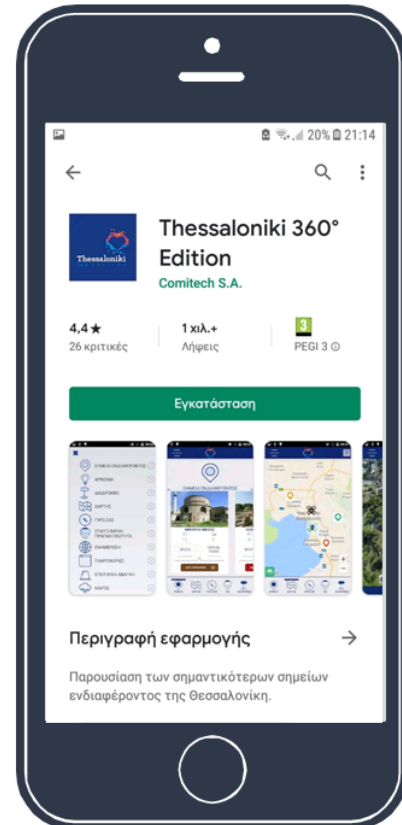
2) **Thessaloniki Map and Walks.** This handy application presents you several self-guided walking tours to see the best of the Thessaloniki, and it comes with detailed tour route maps and powerful navigation features to guide you from one sight to the next. No need to hop on a tour bus or join a tour group; now you can explore all of the best attractions on your own, at your own pace, and at a cost that is only a fraction of what you would normally pay for a guided tour.



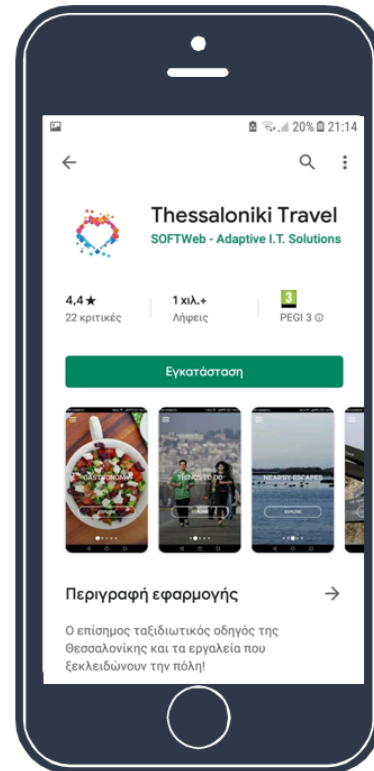
3) **ThessBook.** ThessBook provides up-to-date, accurate and personalized information on a variety of points in the wider urban area of Thessaloniki, including: Open Pharmacies and Gas Stations, Open Public Services, Hospitals and Affiliates, Catering Services, Restaurants and Bars, Grocery Stores and Super Markets.



4) **Thessaloniki 360° Edition.** This is an app of the Region of Central Macedonia that emphasizes the presentation of the most important points of interest in Thessaloniki using 360-degree spherical panoramas. The impressive spherical imagery is both aerial and terrestrial and is composed in small virtual tours, presenting the sights. Along with photographic material, brief information on each point is also presented. The user can browse places of interest either through structured categories or through an interactive map or camera on their device through augmented reality application. Routing from point to point of interest, sharing of material on social networks, receiving meteorological forecasts and an emergency message are also provided.

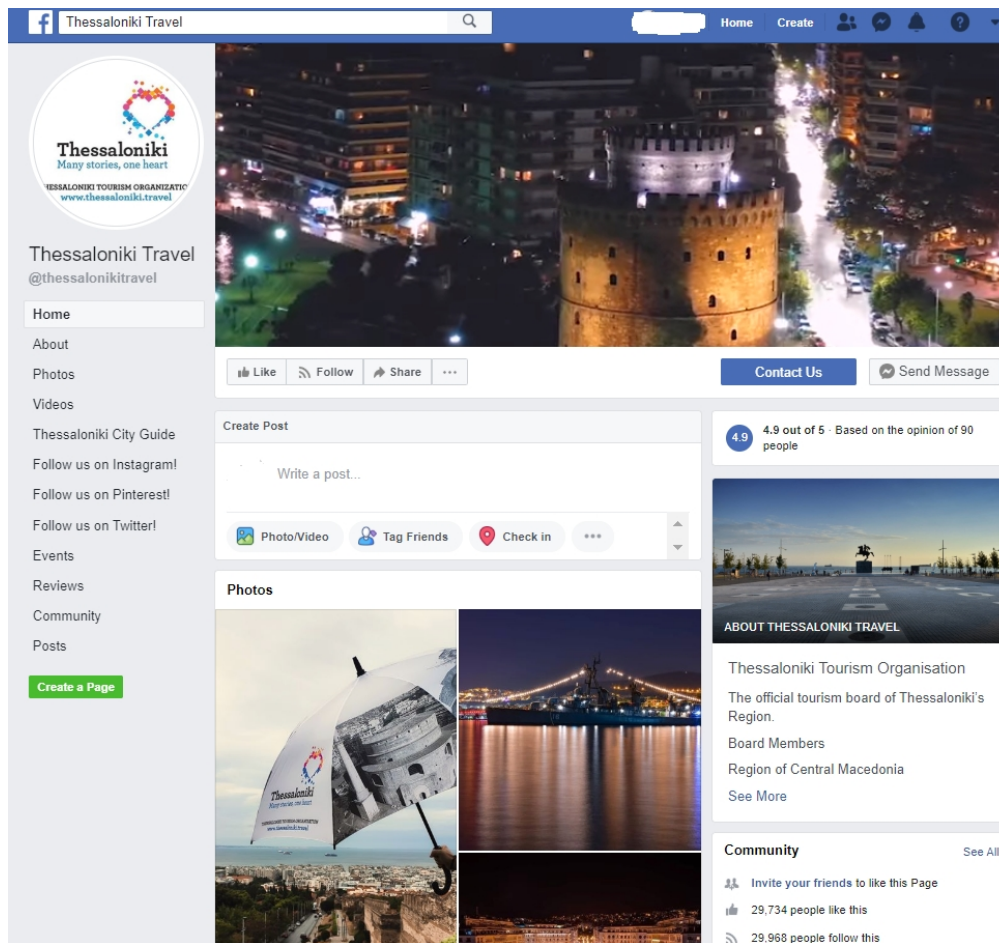


5) **Thessaloniki Travel.** The official Thessaloniki Travel guide and offline map, a comprehensive guide to everything that's happening in and around Thessaloniki. Helps tourists to find the hidden gems, explore the city like a local and make the most of tourists' visit. It presents the hotspots for tasting the Mediterranean flavors and local products, exploring the nearby escapes, finding out the upcoming events. From top attractions, stunning museums and galleries to UNESCO monuments and from amazing shopping experiences to buzzing markets, gorgeous parks, eclectic nightlife and some of the most famous landmarks.

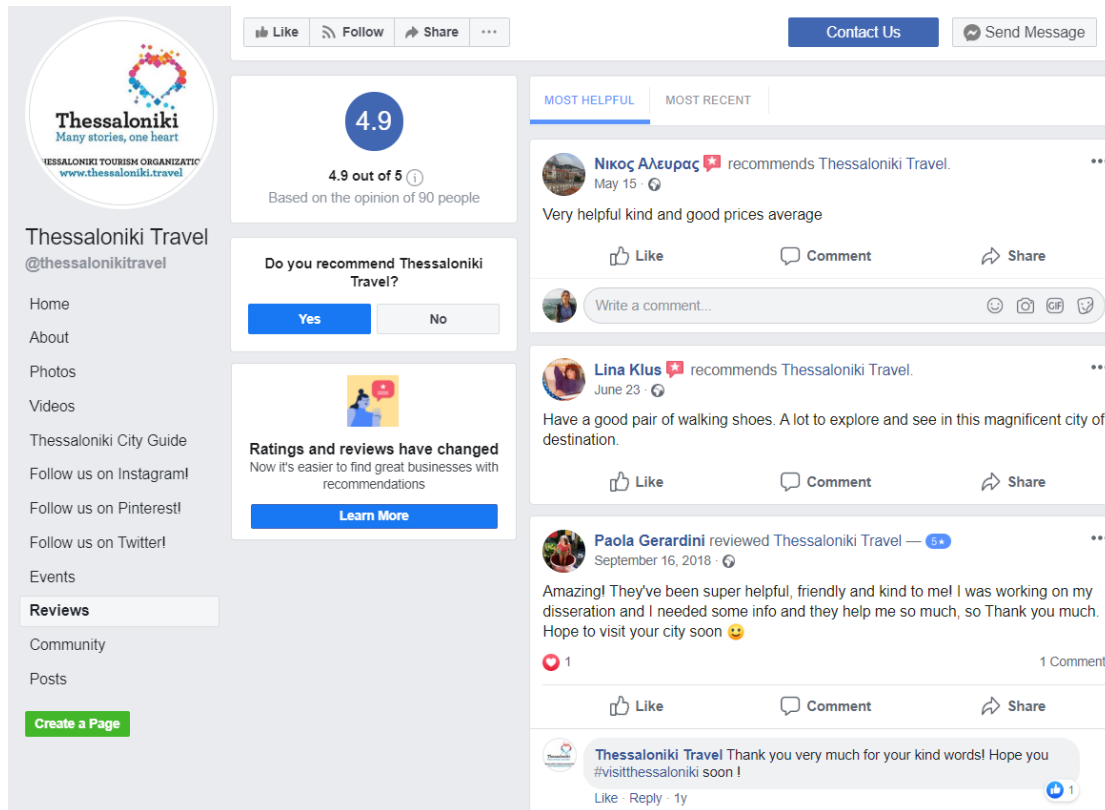


Last but not least, it is appropriate to refer to the presence of Thessaloniki at Social Media. And due to the fact, that in the next section Thessaloniki Tourism Organization (Thessaloniki Travel) will be analyzed, we are going to present this Organization's presence.

As we can see at the following image, Thessaloniki's official Tourism Organization Facebook Page has nearly 30.000 likes and about the same number of followers.

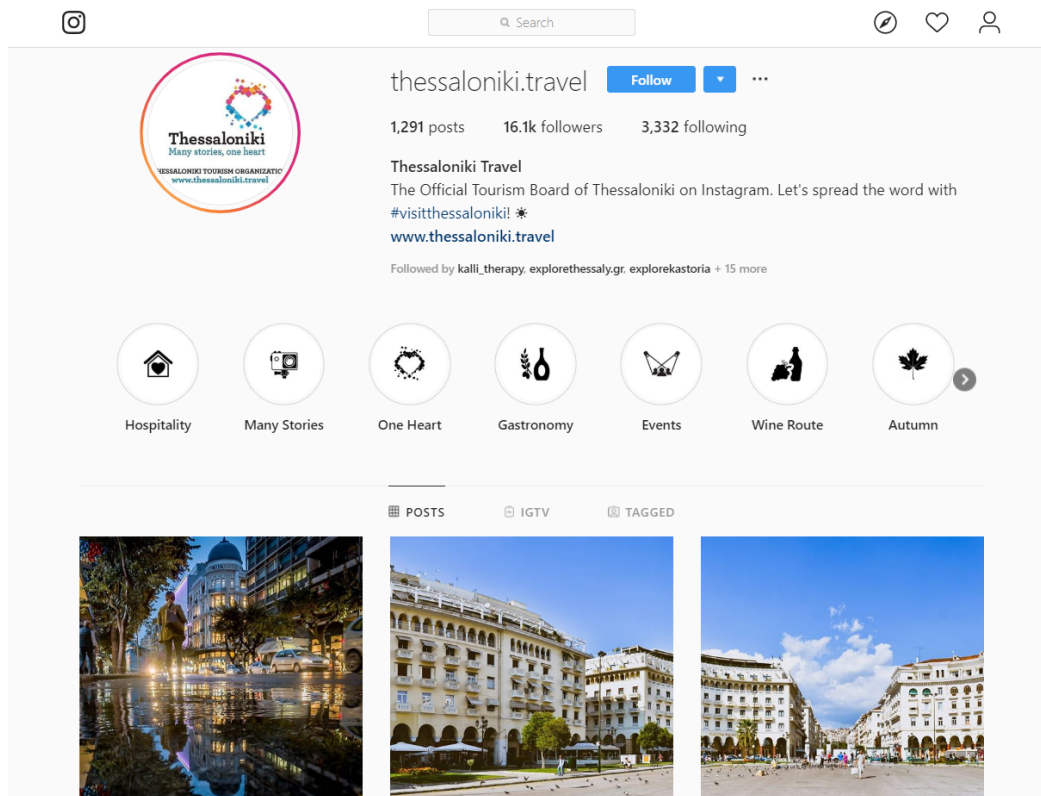


In this Facebook page, many photos and videos of the city are uploaded, as long as many invitations and information about local events. As we analyzed the importance of review in the previous chapter, now it is the time to see how tourists assessed this organization.

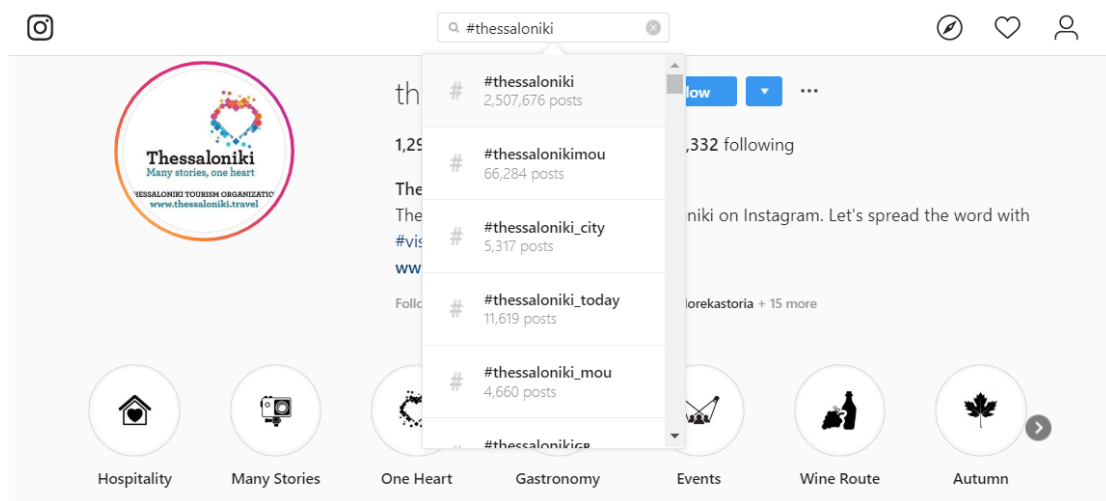


It is obvious from the image above that the feedback from the tourists is very positive and the page has totally a rate of 4.9 out of 5, something that is a very big amount.

Regarding Instagram, there is a powerful presence there, too. As depicted at the image below, Thessaloniki Travel has 16.100 followers. Moreover, it has posted 3.200 photos/videos, which is such a great number.

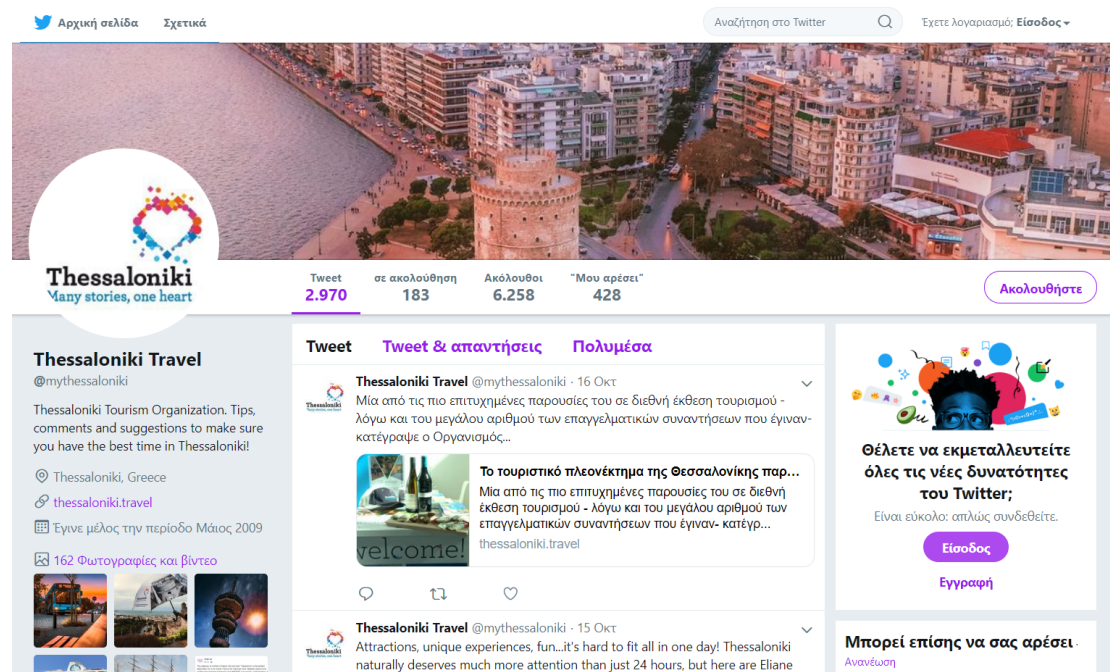


As long as Instagram uses mainly hashtags, it is appropriate to search for the times someone has used #thessaloniki hashtag.



As we can see people have use it in 2.507.676 posts, a huge number which is worth mentioning. Additionally, it is worth to think that there are many different hashtags that refer to Thessaloniki, such as #skg, #salonika, #thessalonikiGR etc.

Another network in which Thessaloniki Travel has used to promote the city is Twitter. Although this network is not as used as the above, it is important to have presence there. So, it has tweeted 2.970 posts and has 6.258 followers:



4.5 Online Campaigns

Wanderlust Greece

Thessaloniki Tourism Organization and Marketing Greece collaborated in November 2018 to create the first modular Broadcasting Live Campaign for Thessaloniki Tourism.

The reason for Wanderlust Greece, DiscoverGreece.com's digital travel show, which opened in Thessaloniki a new cycle of promoting the tourist areas of Greece, presenting well-known, lesser-known and distinct tourist experiences and routes of the city and the wider area.

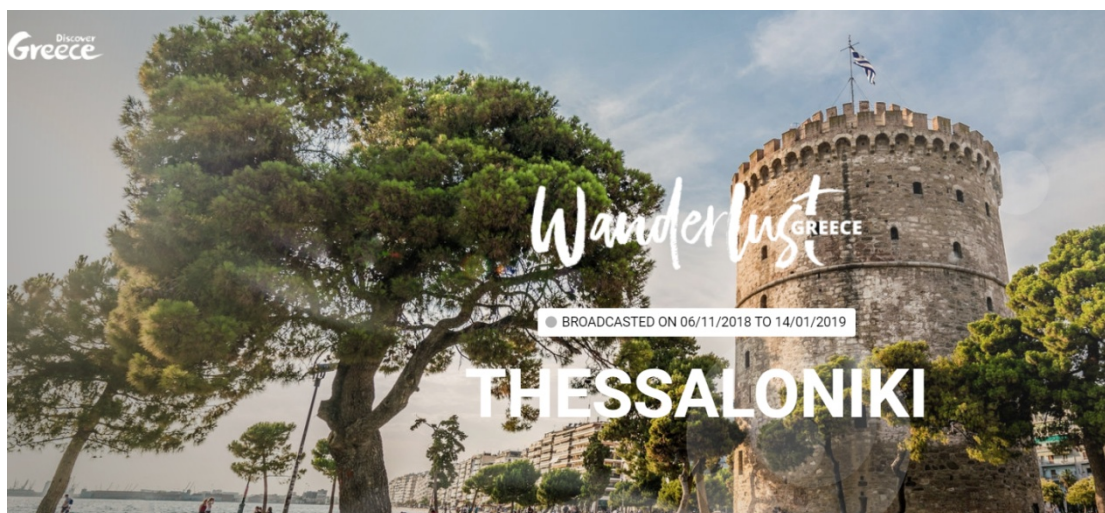
The pair of presenters (Yabatravellers) lived and streamed live through social media the daily pulse in Greece's second largest city, revealing all the secrets that make Thessaloniki adorable to Greeks and foreigners. The campaign brought to the

forefront the most unique experiences a visitor is looking for in a complete three-day trip to Thessaloniki.

Presenters of the Digital Travel Show are professional travel influencers and have captured their experiences from Umbrellas and Sunsets, the White Tower, the Beach and Ladadika, the Archaeological and Byzantine Museum, the OTE Tower, Aristotle's Square, Wine and Film Festival, relaxed rhythms and 'City by Night'. The neighborhoods of the Upper Town and the landmarks of Thessaloniki. They did a separate gastronomic tour and chose Vergina and Olympus for nearby destinations. (gnoristetinellada.gr, 2019)

The tools used in this campaign were (marketinggreece.com, 2019):

- ✓ Campaign website
- ✓ Landing page with main visual, story, call to action and promotion space for the sponsor
- ✓ Interactive map showing presenter's route
- ✓ Travel show gallery (Videos, Photos, 360° content)
- ✓ Destination media kit for users interested in learning more about the destination
- ✓ Social media campaign
- ✓ Special promotional plan for live and engaging content on Discover Greece social media community, which has passed 1.160.000 members (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube)
- ✓ Seasonal videos
- ✓ Creation of promotional videos for each destination, using the latest videography techniques and aesthetics
- ✓ Digital media plan
- ✓ A digital promotion plan with Instagram and Facebook Ads, following a Media Plan for each destination



Source: <http://www.wanderlustgreece.com/>

Thessaloniki Food Festival

2011 was the beginning of a truly original idea: dozens of Thessaloniki restaurants announced they were offering a full menu for just \$ 10 every Tuesday. The initiative was one of the activities of the Food Festival of the Municipality of Thessaloniki and the rationale was simple and practical, with the key benefit of fostering local catering entrepreneurship and tourism.

In an atmosphere of crisis, which was already shaping up to be the new situation, restaurants began to refill in the middle of the week, and people found a way to get out a bit more, but also to visit places in the city that their pocket might not get up.

Seven years later, the venture has been established and continues to attract the public of the city, and not only. There are many tourists and passers-by from Thessaloniki who are informed about the delicious and economical Tuesdays in order to visit the restaurants and try the suggested menus. In fact, the list of participating restaurants is often enriched, changed and always has to propose and highlight a new city area for culinary exploration.

The idea has even traveled from Thessaloniki to Athens, and from there to Sweden, embarking on a wonderful trend spreading across Europe: taste and a super price for a night every week. (praximag.gr, 2019)

This campaign mainly used a website and social media campaigns.



THESSALONIKI Food Festival

Source: <https://foodfestival.thessaloniki.gr/>

Many Stories, One Heart

This campaign created by Thessaloniki Tourism Organization in December 2018 and it invites people to be photographed in the big heart set up at Aristotelous Square.

“Enter the heart of Thessaloniki. Take a photo. Upload your story. And send your own message, "with the hashtag #manystoriesoneheart. It is the invitation of the Thessaloniki Tourism Organization to friends, passers-by and visitors.

On Christmas day, in the heart of the city, Aristotelous Square, the Thessaloniki Tourism Organization placed its logo. A huge heart, to embrace the wishes of the whole world to be photographed in it. The heart of Thessaloniki symbolizes the mosaic of her stories, "ManyStories, OneHeart". It is part of the campaign implemented by the Thessaloniki Tourism Organization with the aim, those who are photographed to send, their own story for good.

Residents and visitors are photographed in the colorful heart of their photo upload using the hashtag #ManyStoriesOneHeart on Instagram, Facebook and other social media. (thestival.gr, 2018)

This campaign focused mainly at social media.



Source: <https://thessaloniki.travel/el/%CE%BD%CE%AD%CE%B1-%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BD%CF%8E%CF%83%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%82/item/3941-thessaloniki-many-stories-one-heart>

Thessbrunch

Thessbrunch is an initiative of the Thessaloniki Hoteliers Association and aims to offer many different brands proposals, giving the opportunity not only to the visitors but also to the residents of the city to enjoy it.

Thessbrunch is hosted at a different hotel in the city and at selected times (summer, autumn, Christmas, etc.), with the first had took place on May 28, 2017 at The Excelsior Hotel.

For the needs of the project, the Thessaloniki Hoteliers Association created the gastronomic portal www.thessbrunch.com, which includes information on hotels, menus, and the specially designed food blog that called “Food4Thought”, posts by food bloggers and nutritionists. Also posted on the portal will be the energy program as well as the hotel that hosts it each time.

In the context of the Thessbrunch, the first competition with the hashtag #koulouriofthemonth is launched, targeting the general public not only in Thessaloniki but also in Greece and abroad, choosing one of the most popular products in the city other than Thessaloniki bun.

The public can take part in the photo posting contest, simply using a Thessaloniki bun as a picture frame, positioning it as a frame to focus on various points such as buildings, faces, plates or whatever else it wishes to include in a photo. It is enough to upload the photo with hashtag #koulouriofthemonth or send a message to the social media.

Each month the photograph who gathers the most buns will win two nights in Thessaloniki as long as the contestant stays outside of Thessaloniki, while for the city's residents the gift will be a two-person Thessbrunch at one of the participating hotels. (tourismprss, 2017)



Source: <https://money-tourism.gr/fthinoporinos-aeras-thessbrunch-koulouriofthemonth/>

WWI Memorial Tourism

World War I memorials, sites and points of interest across Greece, have been identified and recorded in efforts to attract tourists as part of a new campaign launched by the Thessaloniki Tourism Organization.

Titled “World War I – Memorial Tourism in Greece”, the campaign is organized by the THO in collaboration with the Regional Unit of Kilkis under the auspices of the Central Macedonia Region and aims to highlight the history of Thessaloniki and surrounding regions through its WWI monuments.

The campaign, launch on occasion of 100 years since WWI, has already attracted the interest of international media as well as travelers interested in war history. Five thematic tours are on offer including visits to the Jewish Cemetery, the Zeitenlik allied military cemetery, the Thessaloniki War Museum as well as to war sites Doiran, Skra Kilkis, Vergina, Pella, Fort Rupel and Kerkin Lake.

This project has also made it possible for Greek and international tourism stakeholders to network, including the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Imperial War Museum, the Greek Embassy in London, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the Hellenic War Museums and the Greek National Tourism Organization. (GTP, 2017)

Planet Holidays - tour operator from England - presented the SALONICA FRONT WWI -Thessaloniki Kilkis program in full-page listing on its brochure and in the London Daily Mail as one of the top 10 War Memorial tours. (ka-business.gr, 2018)



Source: <https://news.gtp.gr/2017/07/06/thessaloniki-promotes-wwi-memorial-tourism/>

4.6 Awards

The activities of Thessaloniki's tourism organizations have received a variety of awards.

More specifically, at the Tourism Awards 2019, two gold awards in the categories of Digital Tourism and Destinations - Tourist Attractions were awarded by the Thessaloniki Tourism Organization. The award in the category of Online Presence (Digital Tourism) concerns the completeness and innovative applications of the portal *thessaloniki.travel* (Thessaloniki official guide) and the other in the category City Break destination (Destinations - Tourist Attractions) awarded to the Agency for actions and actions of making Thessaloniki City Break Destination and destination of different forms of tourism. (Travel Daily News, 2019)

More specifically, the award in the category of Online Presence refers to the constant and consistent presence of the Tourism Organization on the Internet, social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, TripAdvisor), the daily running of the Calendar with interesting suggestions for city visitors and the three applications Thessaloniki Travel, Thessaloniki VR and Thessaloniki UNESCO VR. With the last

two visitors can tour three-dimensional around the city's 30 tourist attractions (monuments, sights, etc.).

While the Destinations-Tourist Attractions category for City Break Destination nomination concerns the Agency's performance in promoting Thessaloniki as an urban destination, developing its ideal city break destination, promoting its multicultural identity, special gastronomy and all other forms of tourism that make up its tourist profile.

At the same time, Historical Memory Tourism was the silver winner in the category of "Cultural Tourism", which was awarded the "Salonica Front WWI" integrated tourism promotion campaign. The first areas in Greece that organized Salonica Front WWI Battlefields, War Museums and Military Cemeteries were Thessaloniki and Kilis. The campaign was organized by the Pass Partout - Tourism Marketing office in collaboration with the Regional Unit of Kilis and the Thessaloniki Tourism Organization, under the auspices of the Region of Central Macedonia.

The jury and the tourism companies that were awarded were selected by a Special Jury composed of well-known tourism personalities, academics, successful practitioners and well-known business consultants. (money-tourism.gr, 2019)

Thessbrunch's success story won the impression and won the Strategy & Innovation Award at the Tourism Awards 2018.

According to a Thessaloniki Hoteliers Association announcement, at a spectacular event held at the Hellenic World Culture Center on Tuesday, March 20th, the Thessaloniki Hotel Association's "child" took second place as an innovative concept among its best practices. for the first time at the Hoteliers Association of Thessaloniki in honor of the Tourism Awards 2018. (vorla.gr, 2018)

Conclusions

In concluding this dissertation, it is prudent to present the conclusions drawn. E-tourism refers to the completion of all tourism-related processes using the Internet and telecommunications. Online tourism has enabled visitors to access reliable real-time data and is generally intended to improve the quality of the tourist experience.

Through the review of statistics available on the World Wide Web, the intensive use of the internet in the tourism industry has become clear. In particular, 82% of bookings in 2018 were made online. This has brought about a number of changes in this area. Some of them are the access of visitors to a huge amount of data, the minimization of costs and the increased satisfaction of tourists.

In this thesis, two main tourism website models were presented. According to the first (Model of Internet Commerce Adoption), there are three levels of tourism websites: the first that deals with the basic presentation of tourism services, the second that provides some interactions with the user and the third that offers the completion of all processes through internet. Based on the second model (Web site quality assessment criteria toolbox), websites are evaluated on the basis of some characteristics, such as usability, reliability, architecture or performance.

In addition, both the advantages and disadvantages of online tourism were analyzed. Benefits include increased efficiency, access to more data, cost savings and consistency of public ratings. On the other hand, some disadvantages are the loss of human employments, corporate rivalries and privacy issues.

In addition to the general elements of online tourism, special emphasis was placed on the role of social media. More specifically, their importance in the business was emphasized, as 93% of social media users believe that every business should have a social media account.

Social media and tourism services were then interconnected, referring to the two types of social media promotion: the one created by companies and the one created by users. However, special emphasis was placed on the second type, emphasizing that users are now sharing their experiences on social media, making recommendations to potential visitors and evaluating services and products they have used.

Influencer marketing has also been mentioned as one of the trends that has dominated in recent years. The main reasons that a tourism service provider should use this type of marketing is to boost the brand, to reach a broader public or even to make sales through this way.

The advantages that social media bring to the tourism industry include, among others, user-friendliness, cost reduction, free access to information and reliability. However, there are some disadvantages such as the protection of personal data and the reduction of human interaction.

Closing the dissertation, the case of Thessaloniki was presented, in relation to its online tourism presence. There is a great deal of mobility both in websites and in social media and mobile apps. Some of the most popular organizations are the Thessaloniki Tourist Organization, the thessalonikiguide.gr and the explorethessaloniki.eu. Some of the city's most successful tourism campaigns are Wanderlust Greece, Thessaloniki Food Festival, Many Stories, One Heart, Thessbrunch and WWI Memorial Tourism. Thessaloniki has won a number of awards including two gold awards in the categories of Digital Tourism and Destinations - Tourist Attractions at the Tourism Awards 2019 and moreover the silver award in the category of "Cultural Tourism". Finally, Thessbrunch's success story won the impression and won the Strategy & Innovation Award at the Tourism Awards 2018.

The present work could be an important source of information for tourism service providers as well as for various facilitators since a holistic approach is being made to online tourism and in particular to the role of social media.

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